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THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A PRECARIOUS PLURAL DEMOCRACY:  
THE CASE OF LEBANON

by

MAY FAWAZ-HUBER

Under the Direction of Dr. Leonard Teel

ABSTRACT

This dissertation probes the role of the media in Lebanon, a plural democracy, characterized by a deeply divided society and a fragmented political culture. By using case study research and critical discourse analysis of television texts, the dissertation investigates the degree to which the media, which operate relatively freely, reflect social and political divisions, and whether they work to exacerbate these deep divisions or attenuate them.

The study makes the case that, because the media reflect the "precarious" sociopolitical framework within which they operate, Lebanese media discourse is naturally inclined to be polarized in stories of identity and power struggle and neutral in stories devoid of identity issues. In contrast to a general tendency to view all media through a normative Western lens, this study argues against this normative appraisal in the case of the Lebanese media. It contends that the role of the Lebanese media can be better understood if analyzed in conjunction with the media's sociopolitical framework and in the way the media reflect conflicting and overlapping communal norms.

INDEX WORDS: Plural society, Plural democracy, Consociational democracy, Lebanese media, Political sectarianism, Social sectarianism, Identity conflicts, Lebanese television, Media battles

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A PRECARIOUS PLURAL DEMOCRACY:  
THE CASE OF LEBANON

by

MAY FAWAZ-HUBER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

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May Fawaz-Huber  
2013

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A PRECARIOUS PLURAL DEMOCRACY:  
THE CASE OF LEBANON

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May 2013

## **DEDICATION**

*To Christian,*

*My prince in shining armor; my love, my life, my everything...*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The more than half century following the publication of *Four Theories of the Press* has witnessed a proliferation of scholarship addressing questions about the form and function of the media in society.<sup>1</sup> While scholars have attempted to answer these questions by looking at different forms of political and cultural environments, particular attention has been focused on the relationship between media and democratic government, as the media are, what Mughan and Gunther call, "the connective tissue of democracy...the principal means through which citizens and their elected representatives communicate in their reciprocal efforts to inform and influence."<sup>2</sup> Despite a growing literature, scholars have bemoaned the paucity of media typologies that can provide accurate and reliable explanations of media systems, especially those outside the Western world. The reason is not only because of the complexities of media systems,<sup>3</sup> but more importantly, because the theorizing, which is largely normative, has complicated the study of the media outside the Western world, as it has normally assumed an evolutionary mode of media systems measured against Western libertarian and social responsibility theory.<sup>4</sup>

While scholars who advocate normative theory insist on the need to distinguish between the "what is" and "what ought to be," maintaining that normative theory "inspires,"<sup>5</sup> this study supports a descriptive and explanatory rather than prescriptive approach to media behavior,

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of these models include Hachten's 'Western' and 'Developmental' models; Mcquail's models: Liberal Pluralist; Social Responsibility or Public Interest; Professional, and Alternative models; Picard's Democratic Socialist Theory of the press; Altchull's three models based on first, second and third worlds: Market; Marxist or Communitarian; Developed or Western; Christians et al's Pluralist, Administrative, Civic and Direct Democracy models, among others.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Mughan and Richard Gunter, "The Media in Democratic and Non-Democratic Regimes: A Multi-Level Perspective," In *Democracy and the Media: A Comparative Perspective*, eds., Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Karol Jakubowicz, "Media Systems Research: an Overview," In *Comparative Media Systems: European and Global Perspectives*, ed., Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska et al (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Ostini, "Beyond Four Theories of the Press: A New Model of National Media Systems," *Mass Communication & Society* 5, no.1 (2002): 45.

<sup>5</sup> Clifford G. Christian et al., *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (The University of Illinois, 2009), 99.

mainly because political culture, which is an important determinant of media behavior, varies greatly from one country to another.<sup>6</sup> In other words, understanding the nature of the sociopolitical environment within which media operate would be useful to our understanding of the reasons behind media behavior and would, therefore, be instructive when comparing between media systems. This approach was undertaken by Hallin and Mancini in a seminal study on the relationship between the political systems and media systems in 18 Western democracies. In highlighting the differences between *majoritarian* and *consensus* democracies, they argue that, in the former, journalists tend to be more neutral and public-service oriented rather than endorsing a particular ideology or group because "it is part of the *political culture* of a majoritarian system... that the parties compete not to gain a greater share of power for their particular segment of society, but for the right to represent the nation as a whole."<sup>7</sup> Consensual democracies, on the other hand, are usually multiparty systems, and party-press partisanship is more likely to occur.<sup>8</sup>

In line with this conversation, I propose to study the role of media in a *plural democracy*. A plural democracy is where society is deeply divided, where political culture is fragmented as a result of ethnic, sectarian, racial, linguistic, or religious cleavages, and where a democratic government guarantees a fair level of representation of the various segments of the society.<sup>9</sup> Using Lebanon as a case, this study joins the scholarship on the media outside the Western world. It is concerned with media that operate within a democratic framework, but where social and political cleavages are segmented to the extent of instability. The aim is to investigate the degree to which

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<sup>6</sup> According to Gabriel Almond, "Every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientations to political action." In other words, political culture embodies the norms, values and beliefs that give meaning and order to the political system. See G. Almond, "Comparing Political Systems," *The Journal of Politics*, p. 396.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics in a Plural Society: A Theory of Democratic Instability* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1972).

the media, which operate relatively freely, are reflective of social and political divisions and whether media discourse works to exacerbate these divisions or attenuate them.

### 1.1. Significance of the Study

*The media and democracy:* The media are a powerful agency of political socialization that plays an intrinsic role in people's identity construction.<sup>10</sup> A journalist's conduct in disseminating information and impacting public opinion is, thus, central to any discussion of the media and its role in society. This conduct becomes particularly exposed in a democratic sociopolitical framework, where the media, operating in a supposedly "free and independent" environment, are "expected" to perform certain responsibilities towards the public, which are set against certain ethical standards. Such standards, as J.A. Stephen maintains, are "concerned both with advancing free and independent media while stressing *responsible use of that freedom*; responsible media foresee the consequences of their actions and *attempt to minimize harm*."<sup>11</sup> Thus, matters of accuracy, truth, objectivity, balance, code of ethics, and advocacy, are paramount to any assessment of socially responsible media conduct.

*The plural democracy and the problem with normative theory:* Despite the almost universality of the need for responsible journalism, empirical evidence has revealed an inconsistency between the responsibilities journalists *ought to* perform theoretically and their *actual* conduct in a real scenario; hence the problem with normative press theories. The gap between the "ought" and the "is" becomes wider in a plural democracy, where the media's responsibility to the public is put to a thornier test: the media may either actively partake in conflicts by siding with the feuding parties and, thus, exacerbate divisions, or remain neutral and work to alleviate tensions.

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<sup>10</sup> This is related to the Agenda Setting theory associated with Maxwell McComb and Donald N. Shaw, and which refers to the ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen J. A. *Ethics and the Media* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 54.



*The role of political culture:* While many factors contribute to the nature of media conduct in a particular system, this study starts from the premise that political culture is a crucial determinant of media behavior; in other words, to investigate media behavior in any system necessitates an understanding of whether political culture naturally produces and easily digests widely accepted norms about socially responsible media that ought to "minimize harm," or whether any normative appraisal would be futile in systems characterized by deeply-rooted societal cleavages and fragmented political cultures. A brief comparison with Anglo-American media is a good example to illustrate this point (this comparison is brought up again in the theoretical framework). While in no way does the study contend that the media in the Anglo-American world have been impeccably responsible, it argues, from a fact, that social responsibility theory emerged from Western scholarship, specifically from American scholars. John Dewey, for example, argues that the media should "interest the public in the public interest," because the basis of democracy is not information, but conversation—and the cultivation of a "culture of communication."<sup>12</sup> Theodore Peterson maintains that "the newspaper should not be politically neutral, but neither should it owe allegiance to any political party or faction; rather it should furnish political leadership by setting the public good above duty to a party."<sup>13</sup> Why did such normative theorizing emerge from American scholarship? Is it because scholars were accidentally interested in the need for responsible journalism, or is it because American *political culture* produces and legitimizes values of "accountability," which are part of the American democratic culture and process? The question about the nature of political culture should, thus, be addressed when studying the media in any sociopolitical system.

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<sup>12</sup> See John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems: An Essay in Political Enquiry* (Ohio University Press, 1927).

<sup>13</sup> Theodore Peterson, "Social Responsibility: Theory and Practice," In *The Responsibility of the Press*, ed. Gerald Cross (University of Chicago Press, 1966), 41.

*The Lebanese case:* The Lebanese case examines how the nature of the Lebanese political culture shapes media behavior. By probing the Lebanese media landscape, in general, and television discourse, in particular, it investigates whether a normative evaluation of the operation of the media within such political culture would be appropriate. The research, however, is not concerned with assessing whether the Lebanese media *are* socially responsible, as such investigation would necessitate basing the analysis on a generally accepted and clearly defined code of journalism ethics in Lebanon, which, to date, is nonexistent. Because as part of the analysis is concerned with investigating the Lebanese media's role in exacerbating or attenuating divisions, the normative question cannot be abandoned altogether. However, the study is more interested in describing and analyzing the way the media present themselves through the discourse they use; whether the discourse is heavily biased and inflammatory, or whether it leans towards moderation.

Lebanon is a compelling case study for four reasons:

1. Lebanon is democratic: Lebanon is a democratic country with the freest media in the Arab world; *its investigation, thus, pushes research on media and democracy, which is mostly West-centered, outside the confines of the Western world.*
2. Lebanon is a *plural democracy*: Lebanon is a country where society is deeply divided along religious, sectarian, and political lines, but where the democratic political system accommodates pluralism. Unlike other Arab countries where governments have traditionally suppressed societal pluralism by forcing national integration through a state ideology often resulting in media control, the Lebanese political system integrated sectarian pluralism into the polity. This formula, known as Consociational Democracy, has guaranteed community representation and cultural autonomy and allowed a high degree of me-

dia freedom. Its purpose, however, is not necessarily to bring about national integration. As Arend Lijphart explains, consociationalism is designed to "turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy."<sup>14</sup> The stability of the system, thus, largely depends on the relationship among the ruling elite; whenever they reach a deadlock, there is always risk of an institutional void, populist reactions, and sectarian clashes.<sup>15</sup> This state of affairs has resulted in a weak government whose stability has often been precarious. *In such an environment, and with the relative freedom given to the media, it would be relevant to examine the degree to which the media reflect the consociationalism of the polity, and whether they are inclined to be enmeshed in disputes or geared towards appeasement, and, perhaps, encouraging national integration.*

3. Lebanon is unique: Lebanon combines two elements whose continuous concurrence is the main factor behind its "unique" character and constant state of precariousness: its plural society and polity and the strategic geographic setting in which it is located. Both Lebanon's sociopolitical divisions and unstable, yet strategic, geographical location, render the country prone to interventions and manipulations from outside. Interventions result from religious, sectarian, political, and ideological affiliations of the Lebanese sectarian groups forming Lebanon's social and political systems with foreign governments and movements.<sup>16</sup> As Michael Hudson maintains, "Both socio-cultural parochialism and external intervention tend to be functionally disintegrative for the political system, insofar as they perpetuate loyalties that conflict with identification with a modern Lebanese

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<sup>14</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy: Power Sharing and Majority Rule in Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Adnan Fawaz, "The Lebanese Predicament," *Conference Speech*, The Lebanese American University, November 1998.

entity.<sup>17</sup> Lebanese sociologist Farid El-Khazen explains that, "What sets Lebanon apart from other divided societies is the regional order within which it has had to interact." He maintains that, "The Middle East is one of the most unstable regional orders in the post-second world international system. Other divided societies in Europe, Asia, or Africa have not had to deal with kinds of regional conflicts that have affected Lebanon, notably frequent inter-Arab disputes and the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict."<sup>18</sup> The sectarian divisions among the Lebanese groups coupled with allegiances by some to foreign actors make it impossible for Lebanon to remain neutral regarding conflicts taking place beyond its borders. Commenting on the involvement of Lebanese and other Arab religious groups in the Syrian war next door, Talal Salman, from the Lebanese pan- Arab daily *Assafir* (The Ambassador), rightfully contends that, "The citizen has never had his religion put to the test as much as it is today, whether he belongs to the overwhelming majority of Muslims, or to the religious minorities — particularly Christians— who are part of the indigenous peoples of the region."<sup>19</sup> He calls the Lebanese experiment "unique" in the way minority groups lack a common identity, referring to them as "entities created and recreated by foreign will and for foreign purposes." *Thus, the role of geopolitics in influencing local politics and national allegiance has its bearing on the media, which deserves even closer attention during this period of heightened religiosity and ethnic awareness, surging not only in Lebanon, but also in the entire Middle East.*

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<sup>17</sup> Michael C. Hudson, *The Precarious Republic: Modernization in Lebanon* (New York: Random House, 1968), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Farid El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon: 1967-1976* (New York: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2000),33.

<sup>19</sup> Talal Salman, "Rise of Sectarianism Threatens Arab Societies," *Assafir*, January 9, 2013.

4. Lebanese sects run the media: Lebanon is the only country in the Arab world where the sectarian communities are stronger than the state.<sup>20</sup> This has prevented the government from controlling the media, which allows for media freedom not available in any other Arab country. The leading Christian and Muslim sects all have political leaders and media outlets that represent their communities. Lebanon's Shiite speaker of parliament, Sunni prime minister, the Hezbollah party, and Christian deputies and party leaders own television, radio networks, newspapers, and online media. It is not that the media reflect conflicting party ideologies, as would be the normal case in other democracies; they are actually *owned or controlled* by political leaders who lead the country and speak on behalf of their religious communities. *The identification with the sect rather than the state, and the ability of sectarian leaders to influence public opinion through their media highlights the importance of the media's role in identity construction.*

As an agency of political socialization, the media's status and role within such a complex environment becomes more critical. Following Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's premise that the media take on the form and coloration of the social and political systems within which they operate,<sup>21</sup> the media in the Lebanese plural democracy are, thus, expected to exhibit signs of conflict and accommodation reflective of the social and political system within which they operate. However, instead of analyzing Lebanese media against a normative Western media model, *the investigation focuses on the interplay of sociopolitical pluralism, geopolitics, and the media—hence, a focus on the context within which the media operate.* To understand why the media operate the way they do, it is necessary to understand the nature of political culture by tracing it

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Young, *The Ghosts of the Martyr's Square: An Eye Witness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2010), 26.

<sup>21</sup> Fred S. Siebert et al. *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist Concepts of what the Press Should Be and Do* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1956), 1.

back to the social system that gave birth to it. As Lazarsfeld et al rightfully point out, "Social characteristics determine political behavior."<sup>22</sup> The sociopolitical context would, therefore, provide a more comprehensive understanding of the operation of the media and expose and explain the complexities associated with their status and behavior. This will provide suggestions about the nature, operation, and limits of the media in the Lebanese plural democracy, which may be helpful for analyzing the media in other plural democracies.

It should be emphasized that the unit of analysis in this research is the nation-state. In the midst of global media proliferation and the rapid transformations in the media climate in the Arab world, some scholars, including Marwan Kraidy, Mohammed Ayish, March Lynch, and Adel Iskandar, are calling for abandoning the nation-state as a unit of analysis and looking for approaches that are transnational. As Iskandar puts it, "Other trends have complicated state-based views of the region's media. These include, [among others] the growing economic nexus between Saudi financiers and Lebanese talent in entertainment television, the growth of production locales across the region, and the increasingly galvanizing issue-based coverage of Arab affairs."<sup>23</sup> Kraidy argues that the rise of pan Arab media makes the nation-state a problematic unit of analysis because such media "consist of an unevenly integrated regional (pan Arab market), superimposed onto national systems and increasingly integrated into the global media market, although in many respects distinct from both."<sup>24</sup> Mohammed Ayish joins this thrust of thought by

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Felix Lazarsfeld et al., *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes up his Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 27.

<sup>23</sup> Adel Iskandar, "Lines in the Sand: Problematizing Arab Media in the Post-Taxonomic Era," *Arab Media & Society* (May 7, 2007), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Marwan Kraidy, "The Rise of Transnational Media Systems: Implications of Pan-Arab Media for Comparative Research," In *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*, eds., Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 180.

pointing out that "A host of national, regional, and global developments seem to have given rise to new patterns of political communication in the Arab world since the end of the 1990s."<sup>25</sup>

The arguments advanced by these scholars are valid in the sense that a global media trend is, to varying degrees, influencing local media environments in several countries of the Arab world; however, this study supports William Rugh's view that, "Important themes of continuity overlay this rapid change [as] national politics still play the crucial role in shaping the media environment of any given Arab country."<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the investigation of the impact of global media on national media would be more relevant in Arab countries that have traditionally had closed media systems and are slowly opening up, rather than in Lebanon, which has always had a relatively open media system. This is not to say that the transnational dimension is insignificant in the Lebanese case; on the contrary, it plays a major role in the development of the media industry in Lebanon and would, therefore, necessitate a separate study. Finally, the use of the term "geopolitical" should not be confused with the terms "transnational" or "global." It is used strictly to explain the sectarian, political, and ideological associations between local Lebanese sects and foreign actors as well as the political and strategic aims of the latter in Lebanon.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

Understanding the Lebanese political culture and how it impacts media behavior requires an explanation of how social and political factors intersect and reinforce each other. In the framework of a plural democracy, two related concepts need to be defined: the plural society and the consociational government. These concepts will be associated with what will be referred to

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<sup>25</sup> Mohammad Ayish, "Political Communication on Arab World Television: Evolving Patterns," *Political Communication*, 19 (2002): 139-140. Also See Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> William Rugh, "Do National Political Systems Still Influence Arab Media?" *Arab Media & Society* (May 2007): 2.

as "social sectarianism" and "political sectarianism" when applied to the Lebanese case. These concepts will be first defined; then, the Lebanese case will be fitted into these definitions.

Pluralism in democratic political theory is generally used to describe societies composed of different groups with competing interests. Divisions could be societal as well as structural, as in the structure of the government, where decision making is decentralized.<sup>27</sup> David Held explains that some American pluralists, who expounded the concept, were interested in the problem of "factions in society" and their competition for power.<sup>28</sup> They agreed that the role of the state was to protect the freedom of factions and further their interest while preventing any individual faction from undermining the freedom of others. Held points out that, it is "the existence of diverse competitive interests [which provides] the basis of democratic equilibrium and the favorable development of public policy."<sup>29</sup> But how are equilibrium and stability achieved amidst an amalgam of competing interests? This question necessitates a distinction between the *pluralistic* society and the *plural* society.

In a *pluralistic* society, "overlapping group memberships" and "cross-cutting" cleavages severely limit the ability of groups to maximize their interests at the expense of others and cause instability. These propositions advanced by theorists such as Arthur Bentley, David Truman, and Seymour Martin Lipset, state that cross-pressures resulting from memberships in different groups with dissimilar interests produce moderate attitudes.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, M.G. Smith, who makes the distinction between the *plural* and the *pluralistic* society, maintains that, although

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<sup>27</sup> Paul H. Conn, "Social Pluralism and Democracy," *American Journal of Political Science* 17, no. 2 (1973): 238.

<sup>28</sup> Such scholars, including Robert Dahl and David Truman were influenced by the Madisonian heritage in American democratic theory and utilitarian concepts of the competitive pursuit of interest satisfaction. For more, see Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) and David Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

<sup>29</sup> David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 159.

<sup>30</sup> See David B. Truman, *Governmental Process* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951); Arthur F. Bentley, *The Process of Government: A Study of Social Pressures* (Evanston, IL, 1955), and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: the Social Bases of Politics* Garden City (New York, 1960).



there are different subcultures in a *pluralistic* society, peoples' value systems are "compatible with the national political consensus."<sup>31</sup>

Shared political values mean there is a homogenous political culture which plays an important role in political stability. A good example would be Anglo-American political systems, which Gabriel Almond describes as "characterized by a homogeneous, secular political culture... There is a sharing of political ends and means. The great majority of the actors in the political system accept as the ultimate goals of the political system some combination of the values of freedom, mass welfare, and security. There are groups which stress one value at the expense of the others; there are times when one value is stressed by all groups; but by and large the tendency is for all these values to be shared, and for no one of them to be completely repressed."<sup>32</sup>

This sharing of political ends makes it conceivable to relate some Western media models to this political culture. For example, one of the models that Christian et al. advance is *The Pluralist Democracy Model*, also known as *Liberal Pluralism*, characterized by a decentralization and dispersal of power to best guarantee against conflict that might emerge as a result of the plurality of groups. In such a democracy, the media are often segmented and partisan, with each group having their own media outlet for mobilization, advocacy and recruitment. However, safeguarded by the state, the media play the role of sustaining the "constructive conflict which fuels the process of competition, which allows citizens to decide what choices and decisions best suit their needs."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Hallin and Mancini's North Atlantic or Liberal Model, characterized by strong commercialism, limited state intervention, and moderate pluralism applies to Anglo-American systems. In Hallin and Mancini's words, "social divisions [in the United States] have not been expressed in distinct political ideologies or political party systems organized around

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<sup>31</sup> Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics in a Plural Society: A Theory of Democratic Instability*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Gabriel Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," *Journal of Politics* 18, no. 3 (1956): 398.

<sup>33</sup> Christians et al., *Normative Theories of the Media*, 18.

such ideologies. The American political party system is organized around two catchall, centrist parties, both committed to a liberal political culture that is essentially taken for granted." <sup>34</sup>

A *plural* society, on the other hand, is one which lacks national political consensus and as J.S. Furnivall describes it, lacks "a common social demand."<sup>35</sup> The concept originated when Western sociologists and anthropologists were studying people under colonialism. According to Leo Kuper, the plural society refers to "the many new states that achieved independence after World War II and now seek to transform from state to nation the medley of peoples inherited in arbitrary combinations from the colonial powers."<sup>36</sup> However, the term need not necessarily be connected with colonialism. Kuper explains that the term generally denotes "societies characterized by certain conditions of cultural diversity and social cleavage... [where] stability is seen as precarious."<sup>37</sup>

M. G. Smith, who refined the concept, maintains that plural societies are heterogeneous to the point that the different segments composing them, which have internally homogenous cultural traditions, are incompatible. While members of these segments mix socially, they are incapable of cultural unity since they have basically contradictory core institutions, such as kinship, religion, education, and other elements of social structure.<sup>38</sup> The only place where the different segments are able to meet, as Furnivall maintains, is the marketplace, because people are similar in economic needs.

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<sup>34</sup> Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, 239.

<sup>35</sup> The first to introduce the concept of the plural society was J.S. Furnivall, a British economist and administrator, whose work in Burma and Java in the 1940s led him to develop the concept. His accounts say that people there mixed but did not combine. As he puts it, "Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the marketplace, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately within the same political unit." See J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (NYU, 1956), 304.

<sup>36</sup> Leo Kuper, "Plural Societies: Perspectives and Problems," *In Pluralism in Africa* (CA: University of California Press, 1971), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> M. G Smith, *The Plural Society in the British West Indies* ( University of California Press, 1965), 75-92.

In such a society, Lijphart explains, the agents of socialization tend to be organized along lines of segmental cleavages, which may be religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial, or ethnic in nature. The plural society is also associated with the concept of the "non-national state," where more than one society exists within the same political unit, but do not agree on their national entity.<sup>39</sup> Terms related to plural societies include "vertical pluralism," "segmented pluralism," "social fragmentation," "ideological compartmentalization, or in the Lebanese case, "confessional/sectarian pluralism."<sup>40</sup>

This incompatibility between the different institutional systems in a plural society necessitates in both Furnivall and Smith's view *the use of force to maintain order*.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, as Rabushka and Shepsle maintain, "The plural state cannot be organized for social normative ends, since these ends vary with the different cultural norms of the respective communities."<sup>42</sup>

How can a stable democracy, then, function in plural societies? The fact that cleavages are not likely to cross-cut but reinforce one another implies that immobilism, conflict, and civil war— in extreme cases— are likely to result. However, Lijphart maintains that a homogenous political culture is not the only determinant of stability. It may be achieved through a power sharing formula by the leaders of the different segments. This is what he refers to as Consociational Democracy. This political arrangement can be devised to rule such societies to prevent conflict without necessarily resulting in social integration.<sup>43</sup> Lijphart defines a Consociational Democra-

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<sup>39</sup> The concept was used by Manning Nash in his study of Guatemala. See "Political Relations in Guatemala," *Social and Economic Studies* 7, no.1 (1958): 65-75.

<sup>40</sup> Hanz Daadler, "The Consociational Democracy Theme," *World Politics* 26, no. 4 (1974): 606.

<sup>41</sup> Emphasis mine; it is meant to point out the fact that although the authors stressed the need for the use of force in their cases, in the case of Lebanon, force has not been used to maintain order despite the fact that elements of the plural society apply.

<sup>42</sup> Rabushka and Shepsle, *Politics in a Plural Society: A Theory of Democratic Instability*, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy*, 28.

cy in terms of four basic characteristics: "grand coalition, cultural autonomy, proportionality, and mutual veto."<sup>44</sup>

For a Consociational Democracy to work, the political elite consciously seek to stabilize a divided society by counteracting the destabilizing effects of cultural fragmentation. Hans Daadler explains that "patterns of inter-elite accommodation, therefore, form an independent variable that may impede and reverse the centrifugal forces at the level of the masses."<sup>45</sup> Generally, the ruling elite should avoid a government by majority rule and seek grand coalitions and forms of proportional representation to secure everybody's share in government. Also, sub-groups must be allowed a degree of cultural autonomy to arrange their own affairs. There should also be mutual vetoes on vital matters that are of high importance to the subgroups.<sup>46</sup>

Among the criticisms marshaled at Consociational Democracy is that it has not succeeded at preventing conflict in many cases—an argument that precludes any solid connection between this form of government and stability. It was also considered by some to be non-democratic, not only because it limits rule to an elite of leaders, but also because it might exacerbate rather than ameliorates inter-communal tensions by institutionalizing ethnic differences.<sup>47</sup> While some scholars have disqualified consociationalism as the appropriate form of government for Lebanon, this study is of the view that this system remains the only suitable formula for governance in Lebanon today. However, the study does not examine whether consociationalism is appropriate or inappropriate for Lebanon. It is only concerned with studying the media within their present plural and consociational setting.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>45</sup> Daadler, "The Consociational Democracy Theme," 608.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Brenda M. Seaver, "The Regional Sources of Power Sharing Failure: The Case of Lebanon," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no.2 (200): 252-254

*How Lebanon fits into the plural model:* Lebanon fits into the plural society model by relatively meeting certain criteria set by Lijphart. First, the segments dividing the society and their sizes must be exactly identifiable: the 18 Lebanese sects divided between Christians and Muslims are identifiable and their sizes, despite the absence of an updated census, known. Moreover, each geographic region in Lebanon has a predominance of one or more sects. Second, there should be coincidence between "segmental boundaries and the boundaries between the political, social, and economic organizations:" social and cultural boundaries among the sects, for example, are evident in personal status laws, where sects—not the state— regulate personal status issues, like marriage and divorce, and where religious marriage takes precedence over civil marriage. This makes inter-sectarian marriages rare and complicated. Other social boundaries are evident in the education system, where the majority of private schools are run by religious institutions attended by students of the same religion or sect. Third, since party and segmental loyalties should coincide, "there should be little or no change in the voting support of the different parties from election to election:"<sup>48</sup> the Lebanese sects are known to affiliate with political parties with diverging agendas and to owe loyalty to sectarian leaders, exhibiting a patron-client relationship. Followers of sect leaders regularly vote for the same leaders from election to election.

In almost every publication on Lebanon, the Lebanese society, with its predominantly Maronite, Shiite, and Sunni communities,<sup>49</sup> is described as "plural" in which "religious sects have had rather separate histories and different outside affiliations in the past and present;"<sup>50</sup> a society characterized by "overlapping sectarian, ideological, economic, regional, and cultural

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<sup>48</sup> Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Theory: Problems and Prospects: A Reply," *Comparative Politics* 13, no.3, (1981): 356.

<sup>49</sup> There are 18 recognized religious sects in Lebanon. The three sects mentioned are the largest ones. More details will be provided in chapter 2.

<sup>50</sup> D. Yaukey, "Fertility Differences in a Modernizing Country," In *Readings in Arab Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures*, eds., Abdullah Lutfita et.al (The Hague: Mouton & Co. N.V., Publishers, 1970), 166. Also See Farid El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon, 1967-1976* (United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2000).

cleavages."<sup>51</sup> Lebanese-British historian Albert Hourani gives an accurate depiction of the "idea" of Lebanon. "The urban idea of Lebanon," contends Hourani, "was neither a society closed against the outside world, nor of a unitary society in which smaller communities were dissolved—but something between the two: a plural society in which communities, still different on the level of inherited religious loyalties and intimate family ties, coexisted within a common framework."<sup>52</sup> As the historical origins as well as the forms of this pluralism are elaborated in the next chapter, the present discussion will be limited to the presentation of basic definitions related to the concept.

Aspects of the plural society manifest themselves through what is known in the Lebanese sociological dictionary as "social sectarianism" or "confessional pluralism." Lebanese political scientist Adnan Fawaz defines social sectarianism as pertaining "to the sect's autonomy in administering for its members—through its recognized religious officials—matters that are regarded as falling within the domain of 'personal status,' such as marriage, divorce, custody, etc."<sup>53</sup> Thus, the basic patterns of social organization, Lebanese sociologist Samir Khalaf explains, are based on what he calls "primordial ties," including kinship, fealty, and religion.<sup>54</sup> They play the role in consolidating social sectarianism, which in turn prevents social cohesion. Fawaz argues that, "Social sectarianism in Lebanon is instrumental in steering the socialization process, in general, and the political process, in particular, in the direction of social fragmentation. The socializing agencies involved in this process—the family, the peer group, the school,

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<sup>51</sup> Bassel Salloukh, "The Art of the Impossible: The Foreign Policy of Lebanon," In *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*, eds., Bahgat Korany, and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2008), 284.

<sup>52</sup> Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (University of California Press, 1981), 175. Also see Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 19.

<sup>53</sup> Adnan Fawaz, "Sectarianism and Lebanon's National Dilemma," *German Journal for Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 28, no. 1 (1987): 22.

<sup>54</sup> Samir Khalaf, "Primordial Ties and Politics in Lebanon," *Middle Eastern Studies* 4, no. 3 (1968): 245-267.

the religious institution, and the mass media—have had a tremendous divisive impact on the Lebanese people."<sup>55</sup> Moreover, religious affiliation in Lebanon, as one Associated Press journalist notes, "is often tied to where one lives, how one speaks, and which TV station one watches. Many Lebanese seem to have a sixth sense for [guessing] others' sects based on dress, hometown, and other factors."<sup>56</sup>

Lebanese sociologist Halim Barakat among other scholars, maintains that Lebanese society lacks extensive open dialogue among the groups, as there is precedence of "private loyalties and interests" over "public loyalties and interests." Other factors that contribute to social divisions include the geographic concentration of the different religious communities, the non-separation of religion from the state, and the legitimization of confessionalism."<sup>57</sup>

The political culture resulting from this social system is clearly fragmented. The "mosaic" nature of the Lebanese society, as Barakat explains, is characterized by a lack of consensus on the fundamentals. Particularly, the Christians and Muslims of Lebanon do not agree on their national identity: whether Lebanon is actually Lebanese or Arab.<sup>58</sup> This disagreement has been translated into a ravaging inter-sectarian civil war that was manipulated by foreign actors backing the warring factions. Even during post-war periods of relative stability, sectarian and political tensions have persisted, not only between Christian and Muslims, but also among sects within these two communities. In Khalaf's words, "The political blocs and fronts are so absorbed with parochial and personalistic rivalries that they fail to serve the larger national purpose of mobilizing the population for the broader aims of society."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Fawaz, 27.

<sup>56</sup> *The Associated Press*, "No Priest, No Sheik Means No Marriage in Lebanon," February 1, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Halim Barakat, "Social and Political Integration in Lebanon: A Case of Social Mosaic," *Middle East Journal* 27, no.3 (1973): 304.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Khalaf, 258.

The sectarian rivalries among the different groups, along with the strong interference by religious authorities in Lebanese and social affairs, have hampered efforts towards the eradication of social sectarianism. One recent example concerns legalizing civil marriage in Lebanon. Until April 25, 2013, when the first non-religious marriage in Lebanon was officially recognized, inter-sectarian marriages required (and still do) either conversion by one of the parties or seeking a civil marriage abroad. In his efforts to promote coexistence, Lebanese President Michel Suleiman proposed a civil marriage law, considering it "a very important step in eradicating sectarianism and solidifying national unity."<sup>60</sup> However, his attempts were hampered by a blatant refusal by religious figures. The country's highest Sunni authority fiercely opposed the law, threatening Muslims who accept it with damnation. While Christian clerics have been more lenient, they have been careful about civil marriage proposals on the grounds that if a civil marriage law were passed, personal status issues, like divorce and inheritance, would still be handled by religious authorities, and changing them would be very complicated and unlikely to take place.<sup>61</sup>

The pluralism distinctive of the Lebanese social structure would necessitate a democratic form of government that would guarantee representation of the different groups. The founding fathers of modern day Lebanon attempted to do so since the Lebanese got their independence from French colonial rule in 1943. The formula was a National Pact that guarantees mutual coexistence by dividing power among the three largest communities—the Christian Maronites, Sunnis, and Shiites. This system, referred to as "Political Sectarianism," explains Fawaz, "pertains to the sectarian quota system which distributes the legislative, executive, and administrative posts of the state among the religious sects that comprise the Lebanese society."<sup>62</sup> This translates into a consociational form of democracy, aspects of which the Lebanese government has exhibited ever

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<sup>60</sup> "No Priest, No Sheik Means No Marriage in Lebanon," *The Associated Press*, February 1, 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Fawaz, "Sectarianism and Lebanon's National Dilemma," 22.



since its creation after independence. The first consociational government established in post-independence Lebanon, however, gave more powers to the Maronites, who constituted a slight majority over others sects. The demographic changes in favor of the Muslims, mutual sectarian alienation, as well as geopolitical factors were among the reasons that led to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975. This necessitated an amendment to the Lebanese constitution in the post-civil war government, guaranteeing equal distribution among the sects depending on their size and political role. While this formula has been on the whole precarious, it has managed to maintain the country's survival.

*The Lebanese media landscape.* The Lebanese media landscape is reflective of the pluralism characterizing the sociopolitical landscape. While the media are highly profit-driven and operate in the freest democratic environment in the Arab world, they are often used as political and sectarian instruments. For example, Hezbollah, a very powerful political and military party, both leads the majority of the Shiites in Lebanon as well as owns Al-Manar TV (The Beacon) and Annour Radio (The Light), among others. Their agenda is highly pro-Iranian, anti-Israeli, and anti-American. Their critics accuse them of aiming to institute an Islamic republic in Lebanon on the model of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>63</sup> Both Rafik Hariri and his son, Saad Hariri, were prime ministers of Lebanon. At the same time, the Hariri family leads the majority of the Sunni sect and owns Future TV, Radio Orient, and, *Al-Mustaqbal* daily (The Future). Their agenda is pro-Saudi Arabian, presently pro-Western, and fiercely anti-Syrian. Although their discourse is "national," they are regarded as a "political station with Sunni persuasion."<sup>64</sup> Nabih Berri, the Shiite speaker of parliament, leads another Shiite group affiliated with the movement, Amal (Hope). He owns NBN and is known to be pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian. Christian leaders,

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<sup>63</sup> Abdul Rahman al Rashid, " Hezbollah and Syria: Who Abandoned Who?" *Asharq Al-Awsat*, June 27, 2011.

<sup>64</sup> Mamoun Fandy, *Uncivil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 73.

too, have their media networks. Two powerful leaders, among others, rule the Christian Maronites: Samir Geagea, who had, at one time, owned LBCI network, lost it, and recently claimed it in a lawsuit, and Michel Aoun, another Maronite leader, whose Orange TV network has been the "mouthpiece" of his Free Patriotic Movement.<sup>65</sup> While LBCI's discourse has oscillated between objectivity and bias, it has, on the whole, been the mouthpiece of the Maronites.<sup>66</sup> Other stations include Murr TV (MTV), owned by an influential Greek Orthodox politician, and Al-Jadeed (New TV), owned by a Sunni businessman. These networks, namely, Al-Manar, Future TV, and Al-Jadeed, are said to be sponsored by competing regional forces: Iran, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>67</sup> Equally, the press, although less sectarian, has been sponsored by foreign, mainly Arab, powers and has also joined the anti-Syrian, pro-Syrian debate. While newspapers tend to have more diversity in their opinion pieces, they may be categorized as pan-Arab or generally pro-Syrian, such as *Assafir*, *Addiyar*, and *Al-Akhbar*, or anti-Syrian, pro-Western, like *Annahar*, founded by a Christian Orthodox political family, and *Al-Mustaqbal*, Hariri's newspaper, to name a few.

Fitting the Lebanese media into a specific typology is problematic. William Rugh, who advanced a typology of the Arab press, placed Lebanon within the "diverse press" typology alongside Kuwait and Morocco. Rugh's main thesis is that, "The most important causal variable affecting the political role of the mass media in [Arab countries] is the underlying political system that prevails in every country. *Other factors such as geography turned out to be not very important.*"<sup>68</sup> Rugh's typology is supposedly based on the similarities in the political systems in dif-

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<sup>65</sup> "OTV Says Negotiations Will Continue," *The Middle East Reporter*, October 22, 2009.

<sup>66</sup> "Wiki leaks: Geagea Sought to Employ LBC for his Political Goals," *Naharnet*, April 22, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Fandy, 78.

<sup>68</sup> William Rugh, "Do National Political Systems Still influence Arab Media?" *Arab Media & Society*, (May 2007): 3. Emphasis mine; meant to show that geography in the Lebanese case turns out to be important.

ferent Arab countries.<sup>69</sup> He argues that the "diverse" press is characterized by competing political parties or groups who can express their views relatively freely. Some restrictions on freedom of expression exist, but they are relatively minimal. Also all newspapers are owned by private individuals or political parties, and they differ in their editorial policies. They may be critical of the government, although some newspapers tend to defend the policies of the government.<sup>70</sup>

This typology is only partly accurate. Not only are the governments of these countries different; the sociopolitical contexts of these countries vary greatly. Therefore, what might seem similar on the surface may be caused by a multitude of factors and is, therefore, an unreliable indication. Moreover, the uniqueness of the Lebanese case makes *other factors such as geography* extremely important, unlike what Rugh argues. Lebanon's geographic position is its strength as well as its Achilles Heel. Foreign intervention in Lebanon's political affairs has a significant bearing on its media.

Nor does a Western model entirely apply to Lebanon. Marwan Kraidy, in assessing the Hallin and Mancini models over the Lebanese case, maintains that Lebanon has aspects from both the Polarized Pluralist Model and North Atlantic Model.<sup>71</sup> The former applies to countries of Continental Europe and is characterized by strong political parallelism manifested in partisan and ideological media. The latter applies to Anglo-American countries and is characterized by moderate pluralism and commercial media. While Lebanon does have aspects of both, it diverges from the Polarized Pluralist Model in the nature of media partisanship. The pluralism in Lebanese media is not rooted in conflicting ideological orientations as is the case in the Continental European model. In Continental Europe, it was mostly ideological rifts between Left and Right

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>70</sup> See William Rugh, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 89-120.

<sup>71</sup> Kraidy, 199.

that were translated into ideological politics, with newspapers "identifying with ideological tendencies, and [where] traditions of advocacy and commentary-oriented journalism were often strong."<sup>72</sup> The Lebanese media, although reflective of disparate and opposing political orientations, are not primarily ideologically driven; they follow politico-sectarian agendas. Lebanese Media scholar, Nabil Dajani, puts it rightfully:

Lebanese media institutions do not fit either the Third World model or the Western Model of media operation, for the existing societal forces in every state determine the structure, content and operation of media institutions. The mass media, therefore, are unique to their society. They cannot have identity or effects outside the concrete instances within which the different forces operate.<sup>73</sup>

It is against this background that the study of Lebanese media discourse should take place. The sociopolitical framework provided has emphasized three important considerations: that the Lebanese Christian and Muslim groups are divided to the point of lacking a "common social demand," a fact which has created a fragmented political culture that has continuously hampered national integration; that the Lebanese plural polity is shaky as a result of its presence in a volatile, yet strategic, geographic setting, which has invited intervention and manipulation of the Lebanese sects by foreign actors; that the Lebanese media are reflective of this sociopolitical setting and placing them within a specific media typology would be problematic.

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<sup>72</sup> Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, 61.

<sup>73</sup> Nabil Dajani, "The Changing Scene of Lebanese Television," *TBS* 7, no. 7 (2001), 1.

### 1.3 Research Questions

This section begins with a hypothesis. Starting from the premise advanced by Hallin and Mancini, and Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm that the media reflect the social and political environment in which they operate, the study supposes that, in the case of the Lebanese plural democracy, the media reflect the pluralism characteristic of the sociopolitical system, but their status and role are affected by parochially sectarian and regional considerations. In the light of the above hypothesis, the following research questions are posed:

1. How have sociopolitical and geopolitical factors shaped the Lebanese plural democracy?
2. How does the consociationalism of the Lebanese polity shape the media landscape?
3. Does Lebanese television discourse exacerbate sectarian divisions or attenuate them?
4. Should the role of Lebanese media be appraised normatively or should it be evaluated in relation to the socio-cultural and political framework within which they operate?

### 1.4 Methodology

*Why case study-research.* The in-depth case study is an appropriate method for this research primarily because it provides the researcher with the possibility of using a combination of data collection tools to explore, describe, explain, and predict processes associated with one or more phenomena.<sup>74</sup> Robert Stake defines this method as "the study of the particularity and com-

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<sup>74</sup> Kathleen Eisenhardt, "Building Theories from Case Study Research," *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 4 (1989): 534.

plexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances,"<sup>75</sup> while Robert Yin emphasizes that the enquiry should take place "especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."<sup>76</sup> This means that the case is not an isolated variable but a dynamic process which is shaped by a variety of factors. By probing the Lebanese media in their real-world context, the study aims to gain new insight which might be instructive for developing, extending, or reversing theory on the media in plural democracies.<sup>77</sup>

While the case study does have a descriptive component, it is mostly explanatory. For it attempts to answer *how* and *why* the media in Lebanon operate the way they do. However, since it is only focused on one media system, the selection of this particular case raises questions as to whether its significance lies in its "intrinsic" value, to use Robert Case's term, or in its "instrumental" ability to provide insight into a larger issue.<sup>78</sup> It is reasonable to contend that this case is mostly intrinsic since its unique attributes make it hard to compare to other cases. Yet, the ability of the case to play a supportive role in understanding the relationship between the media and sociopolitical factors makes it instrumental in providing insight on how the media operate in a plural society with a consociational form of government, which might help elucidate future research in this direction.

*A holistic approach.* Since the aim of the research is to study the media within a particular sociopolitical context, a holistic and comprehensive approach has been adopted; it ranges from historical description and explanation, to observation and analysis of media behavior, to discourse analysis of television texts. The relation between media and their context is crucial for

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<sup>75</sup> Robert Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (CA: Sage Publications, 1995): XI.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009): 18.

<sup>77</sup> D.B. Bromley, *The Case Study Method in Psychology and Related Disciplines* (Great Britain: Wiley, 1986), 1.

<sup>78</sup> Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 3-4.

this research because it is precisely this closeness to the context that helps explain and predict the phenomena under study.

*Sources of evidence.* As a holistic examination covers a not so small range of topics, the relevant data, as Yin maintains, come from multiple and not singular sources of evidence."<sup>79</sup> According to Stake, sources of evidence may come from a historical background, a physical setting, economic, political, legal and aesthetic settings, other factors through which the case is recognized, or informants through whom the case can be known.<sup>80</sup> Yin names these sources "direct observation" (of human actions or of a physical environment); "documentation" (of newspapers articles, letters, etc.); "archival records" (including library records stored in search engines such as LexisNexis and Proquest; mass media records, both electronic and print); "interviews" (open-ended conversations with key participants); "participant observation" (being part of the case being studied); and physical artifacts."<sup>81</sup>

With the exception of direct interviews—which were not essential since the study is mostly based on media discourse analysis—the research tools include almost all of the above mentioned. The study used archival records, including broadcast bulletins and newspaper editorials. The broadcast material was retrieved directly from the following news networks' websites: namely: [www.otv.com.lb](http://www.otv.com.lb); [www.mtv.com.lb](http://www.mtv.com.lb); [www.almanar.com.lb](http://www.almanar.com.lb); [www.lbcgroup.tv](http://www.lbcgroup.tv); and [www.futuretvnetwork.com](http://www.futuretvnetwork.com). Recent newspaper articles (December 2012-April 2013) were retrieved directly from the Arabic newspapers' archive section available on their websites. These are: [www.annahaonline.com](http://www.annahaonline.com); [www.assafir.com](http://www.assafir.com); [www.almustaqbal.com](http://www.almustaqbal.com); and [www.al-Akhbar.com](http://www.al-Akhbar.com). English newspaper articles were retrieved from [www.dailystar.com.lb](http://www.dailystar.com.lb). Older arti-

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<sup>79</sup> Robert Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 838.

<sup>80</sup> Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 49-50.

<sup>81</sup> Izak Benbasat et al., "The Case Research Strategy in Studies of Information Systems," *MIS Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1987): 374.

cles were retrieved from LexisNexis and other search engines. Primary data also include statistics from research institutes, including the Association of Religious Data Archives, the Beirut Center for Research and Information, and Information International. While the analysis focuses on current events, it also pays very close attention to historical, political, and sociological accounts that are instrumental in explaining these events. Some of these accounts come from historical documents; others from public statements, or public interviews or speeches.

The researcher has also been a direct observer of the media situation in Lebanon, having lived there all her life, and a participant observer, by working at one of the leading television networks for many years. For example, the researcher was working at Future TV in 2008, when Hezbollah gunmen stormed and unplugged the station. This incident serves as evidence in the discussion of the tendency of the media to be a destabilizing factor when political and sectarian interests of the leaders who run them are jeopardized.

*The units of analysis.* The case contains what Yin calls *embedded sub-cases*. It is, therefore, referred to as an embedded single-case study.<sup>82</sup> This means that, while particular attention has been given to the overall context of the case—historical, social, political— and how it interacts with the overall media system, sub-units of analysis, namely media texts, were, among others, used, to establish the proposed link between the sociopolitical environment and media behavior. Thus, the media landscape is the main unit of analysis and television discourse is the sub-unit of analysis.

*The sample.* After providing the sociopolitical context, all of the media networks that form the Lebanese mediascape are briefly laid out. However, the research focuses on four TV networks that serve as a sample for the purpose of the study. This sample is not random. It is "purposive:" the units are of interest because "they are important for the times and play a key

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<sup>82</sup> Yin, 773.



role in history."<sup>83</sup> The function of these units is to present the main sectarian and political players whose role is significant in the present sociopolitical and media landscapes. The media networks selected are:

1. Orange TV (OTV), representing Maronite discourse
2. Al-Manar (The Beacon), representing Hezbollah (Shiite) discourse
3. Future TV, representing Sunni discourse
4. Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI), representing Maronite discourse

*Why this sample.* These units have been selected because they fill categories and polar types. Kathleen Eisendhardt maintains that cases may be selected to "fill theoretical categories and provide examples of polar types... in which the process of interest is transparently observable."<sup>84</sup> Therefore, case study research relies on "theoretical sampling" and not statistical sampling.<sup>85</sup> First, these stations represent the three largest sects in Lebanon, or "categories," namely the Maronites, the Shiites, and the Sunnis. These communities are the main players in the sociopolitical game. While other stations also represent sects, including National Broadcasting Network (NBN), the pro-Amal Shiite network, and Murr TV (MTV), the Christian Orthodox network, the selected networks, especially Al-Manar, OTV, and Future TV, stand out for their aggressive role in being the mouthpieces of their communities and their political agendas. Secondly, these networks, grouped two by two, reveal the present political rift and alliances in the country. On one "pole," OTV and Al-Manar represent one political group, namely the pro-Syrian, March 8 forces, and on another pole, LBCI and Future TV represent the pro-Western, March 14

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<sup>83</sup> Daniel Riffe et al., *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 2005), 100.

<sup>84</sup> Eisendhardt, "Building Theories from Case Study Research," 537.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

forces.<sup>86</sup> Other stations would fall on either side of this spectrum. The reason why two Maronite stations were selected is not only because the Maronites are the most influential sect within the Christian community and their stations are highly popular, but also because the Maronites, themselves, are divided. This division tilts the balance of power in the country in favor of one camp or the other. These cases are "paradigmatic" in the sense that they provide an "exemplar" or prototype of the larger problem facing Lebanon. They are also "extreme" in some instances, especially with Future TV and Al-Manar, and understanding them requires a deeper analysis of their causes and consequences.

*The time frame.* The overall discussion of the media landscape in this study covers the period that extends from 2005, the year influential Sunni leader and Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated, to the present. This period is significant because Hariri's assassination theoretically ended Syrian hegemony over Lebanon, a fact which helped restore relative media freedom.<sup>87</sup> For the first time since the end of the civil war, the media are relatively free to operate but are equally affected by the very thorny sociopolitical situation that resulted after Hariri's assassination. The period covered for the selection of the analyzed television texts extends from December, 2012 to April, 2013. This period witnessed major developments in Lebanon and the region, most notably preparations for parliamentary elections, the war in Syria bordering Lebanon, and the Arab Spring affecting the whole Middle East region. These events provide rich material for analysis.

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<sup>86</sup> These alliances formed after the 2005 Cedar Revolution, which took place after the assassination of Sunni prime minister, Rafik Hariri. These groups will be discussed in more detail in chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>87</sup> After the end of the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war, Lebanon was placed under Syrian "guardianship." The Syrian regime took control of the Lebanese polity and suppressed media freedom. Their control of Lebanon started in 1990 and ended in 2005, after Rafik Hariri was assassinated. The end of the Syria era engendered a new episode in Lebanon's recent history.

*The media texts.* The texts were retrieved from the prime-time news bulletins broadcast on the four networks mentioned above. Four news stories, which are believed to be representative of the current sociopolitical and media situation in Lebanon, were selected. Three of the stories are political and one is socioeconomic. They are named as follows:

Story 1: "Sectarian Fears." This story revolves around a debate over a new electoral law. The debate raised sectarian tensions, mostly between Sunnis and Maronites, as well as Sunnis and Shiites, because the law, if passed, would promote the interests of some sects over others.<sup>88</sup> The story occupied the headlines for months and is likely to continue until elections are held in June 2013. The analysis looks at the coverage of OTV, Future TV, Al- Manar, and LBCI consecutively.

Story 2: "Reporting the Syrian War." The importance of this story lies in its ability to show how Lebanese media report an outside event with geopolitical significance. It is meant to probe how local sectarian and political divisions in the Lebanese society take a geopolitical dimension, which in turn manifests itself locally. The analysis compares the coverage of the Syrian war as done by Future TV, Al-Manar, OTV, and LBCI consecutively and how the coverage varies depending on political and sectarian considerations.

Story 3: "Sunni Radicals." This story is significant because it illustrates how local and geopolitical factors intersect to impact stability and sectarian coexistence in Lebanon. Sunni and Shiite groups in Lebanon are clashing because some militants from these two communities have associated themselves with the war in Syria: Hezbollah has been fighting alongside the Assad regime, and the Sunnis alongside the Syrian opposition. The Syrian war has prompted the rise of radical Sunnis, known as Salafists, who have pledged Jihad on the side of their co-religionists in

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<sup>88</sup> Some say that the Sunnis and the Druze will not benefit from this law, as it will be mainly to the advantage of the Maronites and the Shiites. This will be explained in detail in chapter 3.

Syria—a fact which has antagonized Shiites and alarmed other Lebanese groups. The analysis looks at LBCI, Future TV, Al-Manar, and OTV consecutively.

Story 4: "Wage Protests." This story revolves around marches and sit-ins organized by public sector employees and school teachers in demand for wage increases. It is significant because it illustrates an issue that is of high importance to the Lebanese: socioeconomic conditions and their struggle with poverty. Unlike the first three stories, this story is not about identity and power struggles; it is about a basic human need. The purpose of the analysis, which looks at all four stations, is to see whether the media discourse resembles the one used in their previous stories or whether it diverges from it.

*Translation.* Each news story was transcribed and translated by the researcher from Arabic to English. There is a palpable difference between Lebanese news reporting in Arabic and news reporting in English, especially in news leads and news bulletin introductions. While Anglo-American news reporting is known to be short, concise, and devoid of rhetorical flourish, Lebanese news reporting is full of argumentation and figures of speech. A verbatim translation would result in very awkward language, which, in the eyes of American or British journalists or academics, would require polish. However, performing such polish might kill the substance and characteristic of the language, which is purposefully based on argumentation and rhetorical flourish. Therefore, care was taken to translate the discourse as clearly and accurately as possible while retaining its "Lebanese characteristics." For example, a news lead informing that the Syrian regime is making the Syrian people hungry may be stated as simply as "the Syrian regime is starving its people." However, Future TV put it in a more "sophisticated" way: "The Syrian regime is resorting to the starvation of what is left of a Syrian people who withstood the monstrosity of its brigades." As will be shown in the discourse analysis in chapter four, phrases such as

"resorting to," "what is left of," "withstood the monstrosity of its brigades," are, among others, drama enhancing tools, which, if polished, would kill the idea Future TV is trying to communicate. Moreover, some parts of the unusually long news leads were cut because keeping them in their original form would be repetitive and nonessential. Some parts, due to their redundant language, were shortened and translated more "holistically," without affecting their central idea.

*Presentation of the stories.* Each story is laid out in three parts: the first part describes what the story is about; the second part provides the context against which the story should be analyzed; the third part is a discourse analysis of the media texts on the story as presented on the different channels, where argumentative structures of the texts are probed.

The stories are analyzed by using excerpts from one or more news reports, with a focus on the story leads. Focus on leads was made not only because the lead is usually the most newsworthy element of the story, but, most importantly, because the lead, in the case of Lebanese news reporting, is the venue where the news anchor provides an interpretation of the news. It is the place where he or she makes strong arguments, normally reserved for newspaper editorialists and opinion writers. Since leads do not show any images, no visual analysis is included. However, in some cases where full news reports are used, such as "The Syrian War" and "Wage Protests," reference to the images used is made.

*Discourse Analysis.* The media texts analyzed are referred to as the media discourse. While it has been common to use *text* with written language and *discourse* with spoken language, it is commonplace regard the concept of *text* in today's modern Linguistics as including every type of utterance; therefore, a text may be a magazine article, a television interview, or a conversation, to give a few examples.<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that Discourse Analysis considerably

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<sup>89</sup> Laura Alba-Juez, Laura, *Perspectives on Discourse Analysis: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

overlaps with Textual Linguistics. However, Linguistics tends to focus more on the internal structures of a text, or is *text-internal*, while Discourse Analysis focuses more on the context in which the text takes place, or is *text-external*.<sup>90</sup> For example, an analysis of language would look for structures such as "nominalization," or the use of passive rather than active forms of verbs, among others, to explain how discursive practice can hide the agent and promote the interests of certain groups in society. On the other hand, social science analysts who rely less on linguistics use their skill and erudition to study a text by focusing on the context. They are more interested in the *function* the discourse is supposed to achieve. The present analysis considers both linguistic and contextual elements. Particularly, it studies the internal structures of the texts taking into account the *function* they are supposed to achieve in their proper context. This is one of the approaches to Discourse Analysis that Potter and Wetherell present: to find *patterns* associated with the *activity* of language use, performing a certain *function*, within broader *contexts*, such as *society* or *culture*.<sup>91</sup> The present analysis is also critical because it attempts to expose the power struggles that take place through media discourse. It examines how the discourse produces or perpetuates sectarianism, fear, domination and resistance.

Teun Van Dijk, the main exponent of Critical Discourse Analysis, maintains that social power can manifest itself through control of the forms of the media, the form and content of discourse, including persuasion and indoctrination. He maintains that once one is able to understand how the processes of representation take place, he or she will be able to show how, for example, racist reporting about immigrants can lead to the formation or confirmation of prejudices and ste-

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> See Jonathan Potter, and Margaret Wetherell, "Unfolding Discourse Analysis," In *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes* (Sage Publications, 1987).

reotypes, which, in turn, can lead to racist ideologies that reproduce racist talk.<sup>92</sup> Following Van Dijk's method, a critical reading of the texts will be performed as follows:

An analysis of semantic macrostructures: a study of "global meanings," topics or themes. These themes are what discourses are about: they are mostly intentional and easily memorized by audiences. Discursively, topics or themes are expressed in titles, abstracts, summaries and announcements, and, in my case, news leads;

A focus on microstructure or local meanings: this includes an analysis of sentence structure. To unpack the persuasive elements of the discourse, the study looks at rhetorical techniques that include imagery, overstatements, hyperbole, euphemisms, and mitigation among others. It also considers naming choices to show the way each group is called or referred to and explain how in-group and out-group identities are created;

Identification of context models: context models serve as the link between discourse and context. Context models make sure that language users adapt their discourse to the social environment so that it is socially *appropriate*. By laying out the context within which each story is told and the role each sect and media outlet play in it, the study aims to establish the connection between the context and the discourse and explain why the media behave the way they do.<sup>93</sup>

*Advantages and limitations of the method.* The multiplicity of data collection sources in case study research allows for triangulation, which involves "the comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to an object of research interest, [with the goal of seeking] convergence of meaning from more than one direction."<sup>94</sup> By relying on a variety of sources, the

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<sup>92</sup> See Teun Adrianus Van Dijk, "The Role of Discourse Analysis in Society," In *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Vol. 4 (London: Academic Press, 1985).

<sup>93</sup> Teun Adrianus Van Dijk, *News Analysis: Case Studies of National and International News in the Press* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1988).

<sup>94</sup> Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 240.

study attempts to establish stronger substantiation of constructs and hypotheses. For example, the discussion of the political leaning of the Hariri-owned media looks not only at their television discourse, but also at the statements from their political leaders and opinions from their newspaper editorialists. The convergence of meaning from these various sources corroborates the arguments on this topic.

To what extent, however, is this study able to provide solid propositions and build theoretical constructs that may be applicable over other similar cases? This is one of the concerns that skeptics have raised: the presupposed inability of the case study to provide generalizable results. This skepticism comes from a tendency in scientific research to give more value to "theoretical context-independent knowledge" than to "practical, context-dependent knowledge," and to consider the case study biased toward the researcher's pre-conceived ideas.<sup>95</sup> However, to many advocates of this method, this is only a misleading misconception. For example, Donald Campbell defends this method by stressing the fact that "qualitative common-sense knowing is not replaced by quantitative knowing."<sup>96</sup> This implies that Social Science theories are not infallible. Bent Flyvbjerg maintains that "in the study of human affairs, there appears to exist only context-dependent knowledge [as]... there does not and probably cannot exist predictive theory in Social Science [because] it has not succeeded in producing general, context-independent theory."<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Flyvberg argues that closeness to context increases expert activity. It is crucial for "the development of a nuanced view of reality... and [is] important for the researcher's own learning processes in developing the skills needed to do good research."<sup>98</sup> This implies that case

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<sup>95</sup> Ben Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research," *Qualitative Enquiry* 12, no. 2, (2006): 221.

<sup>96</sup> Donald Campbell, "Degrees of Freedom and the Case Study," *Comparative Political Studies* 8, No. 1, (1975): 179.

<sup>97</sup> Flyvbjerg, 221-223.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.



study research is not primarily concerned with generalizability as much as it is with falsification, which may result from the proximity of the researcher to the case under study and its context.

Generalizability, however, may be increased through the strategic selection of the case. For example, some cases are to be "representative" or "typical" and, therefore, use "random samples." The sample size here is decisive for generalization for the entire population. Other cases are more atypical or "extreme," where explanation of deeper causes behind a problem and its consequences is needed; hence a smaller sample chosen for its validity to the study would be more appropriate. Other types include the critical case, selected depending on its strategic importance in relation to a general problem; or the paradigmatic case, one that is prototypical, whose role is to "highlight more general characteristics of the societies in question."<sup>99</sup> As was mentioned earlier, the cases selected in this study are examples of both the paradigmatic case and extreme case.

While case studies do not allow for statistical generalization, they do allow for "analytical generalization," which refers to the generalization from empirical observations to theory, rather than to a population.<sup>100</sup> In Yin's words, case studies "depend on using a study's theoretical framework to establish a logic that might be applicable to other situations."<sup>101</sup> In order to do so, the investigator should be able to show internal validity, i.e., how the results of the study can establish a logical connection between concepts, and theoretical constructs or sequence of events within the study; and external validity, i.e., how the same theoretical propositions could be ap-

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<sup>99</sup> Ben Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research, 232.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Gibbert et al., "What Passes as a Rigorous Case Study?" *Strategic Management Journal*, 29 (2008): 1468.

<sup>101</sup> Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 1022.

plied over cases outside the study, where "similar concepts, constructs, or sequences might be relevant."<sup>102</sup>

As will be shown in the conclusions of this study, the internal validity, achieved through the compatibility of the final results with the concepts and theoretical framework established at the beginning of the study, is proof that analytical generalization has been established. While the study does not assess the extent to which its results are externally valid, as it is only concerned with one case and does investigate whether its arguments apply over other cases, it is possible to draw from the study conclusions which may be applicable over other cases with similar sociopolitical and media frameworks.

## 1.5 Outline of the Chapters

**Chapter 1: Introduction:** The present chapter has provided the conceptual foundations and methodological procedures necessary for an understanding of the arguments formulated in this study. The concepts include the plural society, the consociational plural democracy, social sectarianism and political sectarianism, as well as case study research.

**Chapter 2: Some Aspects of the Lebanese Plural Democracy:** This chapter establishes the sociopolitical framework against which the analysis of the Lebanese media landscape should take place. It provides an elaborate and detailed account of the factors that have contributed to creation of the Lebanese plural democracy and the institutionalization of social and political sectarianism. It includes some historical background that explains the nature of the Lebanese plural society; who the Lebanese communities are; their cultural and religious background; their ideological and sectarian affiliations; their demographic size, etc. The chapter elaborates on the identity issues that hamper their national integration. Similarly, the chapter highlights Lebanon's ge-

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 1032.

ographic position as an attractive venue for foreign intervention and shows how the sects have associated themselves with foreign actors on sectarian, ideological, and political grounds. This section equally introduces the most recent and significant events that are happening in the Lebanese and regional scenes, which are used for the media discourse analysis.

**Chapter 3: Lebanese Media Pluralism and the Politico-Sectarian Divide:** This chapter maps out the Lebanese broadcast media networks and the main print media publications. By focusing on ownership, funding, and content, the chapter establishes a link between politico-sectarian identity and media discourse. Topics discussed include media regulation, coverage of important events since 2005, the year Syrian hegemony over Lebanon officially ended. Similarly, this chapter gives a detailed account of four television networks, namely Orange TV, Al-Manar, Future TV, and LBCI, the discourse of which will be analyzed in chapter four. The chapter briefly discusses the print media in Lebanon.

**Chapter 4: A Discourse Analysis: How Four News Stories Are Reported in Lebanese**

**Media:** This chapter delves deeper into media reporting and critically analyses four recent and significant news stories as they are reported on four different TV channels representing the different sects. The purpose of the analysis is to assess whether television discourse exacerbates or attenuates sectarian beliefs.

**Chapter 5: The Role of the Media in the Lebanese Existential Crisis:** This chapter presents interpretations and findings. It also discusses limitations and proposes suggestions for future research.

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## CHAPTER 2: SOME ASPECTS OF THE LEBANESE PLURAL DEMOCRACY

A walk through Lebanon's capital city, Beirut, is more than just a visit to one of the Arab world's most cosmopolitan cities; it is an unparalleled encounter with the remarkable union between Christianity and Islam. Old churches and mosques stand amid ruins that date from Roman times; church bells are heard against the echoing sound of the minarets. On the streets, in the bazaars, and in every corner of the city, an assortment of different ways of life exhibits a kaleidoscopic array of often contradictory cultural influences: women in fitted tops and designer jeans, others with long loose dresses and veils; mullahs and bearded men strolling one side of the street; youth with spiky hair and Ray Bans, another; night clubs and beach resorts where alcohol and rap music are consumed in abundance; restaurants and coffee houses where alcohol sale is prohibited because it contradicts the values of Islam. To the beholder, this cultural variety is richness itself. It bestows upon Lebanon a distinctive character. It shows that this tiny Middle Eastern country is a "crossroads of civilizations,"<sup>103</sup> as it has come to be known, "a buffer zone between Christianity and Islam, a point of contact between East and West."<sup>104</sup>

Beneath this façade of cosmopolitanism, however, lie problems of an almost irreconcilable nature. The events that have shaped the character of Lebanon, both in its antiquity and its more recent history, are evidence that the Lebanese are a plural society that lacks, what M.J. Furnivall calls, a "common social demand."<sup>105</sup> Their continuous disagreements over the "fundamentals"—their national identity and the political mechanisms that should rule them—<sup>106</sup> have been the main reasons behind a devastating civil war and the perpetual uncertainty plaguing their polity

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<sup>103</sup> Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2004), 131.

<sup>104</sup> Marwan Kraidy, "The Global, Local, and the Hybrid: A Native Ethnography of Glocalization," In *Ethnographic Research: A Reader*, ed., Stephanie Taylor (London: Sage Publications, 2002): 188.

<sup>105</sup> J. S. Furnivall used this phrase to describe communities in divided societies under colonialism.

<sup>106</sup> Halim Barakat, "Social and Political Integration in Lebanon: A Case of Social Mosaic," *Middle East Journal*, 27, no. 3 (1973): 304.

and everyday lives. Talal Salman, of *Assafir* (The Ambassador), rightfully puts it: "The blatant truth is that the Lebanese are not one people; not a people in the first place but conflicting sects and confessional groups that have been so since the beginning of time."<sup>107</sup> Why is there such disagreement over Lebanon's identity? Why does the Lebanese society lack a "common social demand"? This chapter explains how a combination of historical, sociopolitical, and geopolitical factors have collectively contributed to shaping the Lebanese plural democracy and have caused its constant state of precariousness.

## 2.1 The Lebanese Sectarian Mosaic

Any comprehension of Lebanon's cultural and sociopolitical character and the eventual understanding of its media climate should begin by considering two important constants: that the Lebanese people are a mosaic of religious and sectarian communities who have emerged from a history of conflict and mutual apprehension; and that Lebanon's geographical position in a turbulent region— bordering Syria on the north and east and Israel on the south—renders it continuously susceptible to instability and intervention by foreign actors. To understand how these constants coincide, a very brief mention of Lebanon's ancient and recent past is necessary. Before Lebanon became a state in 1920, it existed as "Mount Lebanon," a land of the Greater Syria, which witnessed the rise and fall of several Christian and Muslim empires. Between the first century B.C. and the seventh century A.D., Lebanon (as part of Syria) was a province of the Roman Empire. From the seventh century until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lebanon witnessed a succession of Arab and Islamic empires ruled by caliphs and sultans, with the exception of the period between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the Crusades dominated coastal and northern parts of Syrian territory. The Muslim empires that ruled were mostly Sunni, with the exception of the Fatimid dynas-

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<sup>107</sup> Talal Salman, " Elections: Gateway to Civil War," *Assafir* (In Arabic), January 21, 2013.

ty that ruled in the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> century, which adopted Ismai'li Islam.<sup>108</sup> The last Sunni empire to rule almost all of the Middle East was the Ottoman sultanate, which extended from the 14<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the First World War. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 opened the door for Western powers into the region. Consequently, the area became under British and French mandate and was later divided into artificial states.<sup>109</sup> Lebanon was separated from Syria after it was placed under French mandate. It became the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920. It achieved independence from the French in 1943.<sup>110</sup>

The result of this confluence of cultures and histories is a mosaic of groups of different religions, ways of life, and outlooks. Before the creation of the Greater Lebanon, Mount Lebanon had served as a refuge for persecuted minorities. Christian groups sought the mountain to escape persecution by the established Byzantine churches in Greater Syria. Shiite and Druze communities, on the other hand, also sought the mountain range to escape conformism to Sunni orthodoxy. Elie Salem maintains that these groups "held fast to their religious doctrines and fiercely defended their autonomy in the rugged and strategically commodious terrains."<sup>111</sup>

Lebanon's largest communities are the Maronites, the Sunnis, and the Shiites.<sup>112</sup> Other minorities include Druze, Alawites, Catholic and Orthodox Greeks and Romans, and Armenians.<sup>113</sup> In the absence of an updated official census, it is estimated that 28 percent of the popula-

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<sup>108</sup> Isma'ili Islam is a branch of Shiite Islam also known as Sevener Shi'ism. Adherents follow Isma'il bin Jaafar as the true Imam.

<sup>109</sup> The states that were created were Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel.

<sup>110</sup> See Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003). After Mount Lebanon was separated from Syria in 1920, other territories were annexed to it in order to become a viable state. It became known as Greater Lebanon.

<sup>111</sup> Elie Salem, "Lebanon's Political Maze: The Search for Peace in a Turbulent Land," *The Middle East Journal* 33, no. 4 (1979):445.

<sup>112</sup> In antiquity, the Maronites appeared in Northern Syria and settled in the Lebanese mountains fleeing persecution of Byzantine churches and Muslim rulers. The founder of the sect was Yuhanna Maroun, under whose leadership the sect developed into a distinct community. The Maronites are a branch of Catholicism.

<sup>113</sup> The Druze are an offshoot of Shiite Islam. Followers of an imam believed to embody God on earth, the Druze—a clannish sect—do not follow the fundamental tenets of Islam but have their own religion, known as Unitarianism. This deviation made them susceptible to oppression and persecution at the hands of other Muslims, a fact which led

tion are Sunni, 28 percent Shiite, 22 percent Maronite, 8 percent Greek Orthodox, 5 percent Druze, 4 percent Greek Catholic, and the rest are other minorities.<sup>114</sup> If each sect is counted separately, none of the large communities—the Maronites, the Sunnis, or the Shiites— would make a majority. However, being all minorities with a persecution mentality, their coming together into a nation-state raises questions as to their ability to form a functioning and stable polity. As P.J. Vatikiotis maintains, "When a country is composed of minorities, these invariably have conflicting interests, fears, and aspirations. If they are not successfully integrated into a national community defined by a law of the land and workable institutions that transcend minority boundaries, they are apt to lead to violent conflict."<sup>115</sup> How, then, bring a plurality of minorities with no common vision to coexist in a viable body politic?

Lebanon opted for a pragmatic approach which institutionalized sectarianism in the political system. Its political structure is an example of Arend Lijphart's Consociational Democracy. Lijphart maintains that a homogenous political culture is not a necessary pre-requisite for stability. The latter may be achieved through cooperation and bargaining among the ruling elite. This type of governance does not necessarily bring about national or social integration; its role is to guarantee representation of the different communities to prevent conflict.<sup>116</sup>

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them to practice their beliefs through *Takiyya*, or dissimulation. Druze emirs and feudal families succeeded under the Ottoman Sultanate to rule over Lebanon and Syria for 500 years. However, their power and numbers declined in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, contrary to the Maronites, whose power and numbers were on the rise. Clashes between the Maronites and the Druze in 1840 and 1860 gave the Druze a military victory but not a political one. European powers intervened on the behalf of the Maronites and the resulting political agreement only boosted Maronite power. For the first time, Lebanon was recognized by the international community as a Christian entity. The creation of the Greater Lebanon in 1920 and the subsequent governments that ensued after 1943 further reduced the role of the Druze. Aware of their minority status, which is increasing as a result of their low birth rate and their practice of endogamy, the Druze have been skilled at shifting alliances back and forth with different Lebanese groups to guarantee their political survival.

<sup>114</sup>See "The Association of Religious Data Archives, 2010." The last official census was undertaken in 1932. No official census has been undertaken since out fear that numbers would expose demographic shifts and might affect the "precarious" balance of power. Also, see Josh Wood, "Lebanon Voting Plan Stirs Sectarian Fervor," *The International Herald Tribune*, February 21, 2013.

<sup>115</sup> P.J. Vatikiotis, "The Crisis in Lebanon: A Local Historical Perspective," *The World Today* 40, no. 3(1984): 86.

<sup>116</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy*, 24.

The National Pact, reached among the Lebanese leaders in 1943, established the foundation of the multi-sectarian, consociational state in Lebanon with the purpose of securing representation of all groups and preventing an oppressive majority.<sup>117</sup> The parties to this Pact agreed that the president would always be a Maronite; the prime minister always a Sunni, and the speaker of parliament always a Shiite. In order to accommodate the fragile sectarian balance, other government and public administration offices were also distributed on a sectarian basis with sects holding positions in proportion to their presumed demographic size.<sup>118</sup> As the Christians and the Muslims had diverging views on Lebanon's identity and role in its Arab milieu, the Pact provided that Christians and Muslims would drop their mutual vetoes in return for the acceptance of an independent Lebanon who has an "Arab face" but who would disassociate itself from inter-Arab conflicts.

In the first three decades after independence, this system functioned with varying success. However, it fell short of keeping lasting stability amid the regional Arab-Israeli conflict. The association of Lebanese Muslim and leftist groups with the pan-Arab cause promoted by Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser dragged Lebanon into the protracted struggle. Moreover, the demographic shifts in favor of the Muslim population raised their feeling of underrepresentation and resentment of Maronite domination, triggering, in 1975, a 15-year civil war. In 1989, the signing of the Taef Agreement under Saudi, American, and Syrian auspices ended the war. The Agreement placed Lebanon under a 15-year Syrian guardianship and modified the consociational

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<sup>117</sup> The Lebanese people had experienced forms of power sharing before 1920. Under the Ottoman Empire, Mount Lebanon was ruled by Druze and Christian emirs and feudal lords. In 1840, the mountain was divided into two districts, one ruled by a Christian and one ruled by a Muslim. In 1860, after bloody clashes between the Druze and the Christians, a new political regime was established through intervention by European powers and the Ottoman sultanate, which placed Mount Lebanon under a Christian non-Lebanese ruler, appointed by the High Porte, but who ruled with a consultative council based on confessional representation to ensure participation of all religious groups in the political process.

<sup>118</sup> Imad Salamey, "Failing Consociationalism in Lebanon and Integrative Options," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 14, no. 2 (2009): 84.

formula in order to accommodate demographic shifts in favor of the Muslims. Emphasizing "mutual coexistence" and "fair representation" of the sects, the Agreement adjusted power sharing by increasing the number of Muslim deputies in parliament so that Muslim-Christian representation would be equal.<sup>119</sup> It also reduced the powers of the Maronite president, who had enjoyed privileges under the French mandate, and increased those of the Sunni prime minister. This state of affairs, however, did not prevent deadlock and conflict in the post-civil war era. While Syrian control over Lebanon was able to keep peace and stability in return for total Lebanese allegiance, its end in 2005 paved the way for turbulent episodes that persist to this very day, which are proof that the Lebanese republic, as Michael Hudson calls it, was and remains "precarious."<sup>120</sup>

While this state of uncertainty has been often blamed on the sectarian political system, this study supports the argument that the political system, despite its loopholes and weaknesses, is not the main problem behind the precariousness of the Lebanese plural democracy. "The main problem," as Adnan Fawaz contends, "is the fragmentation of the social system and the strategic location of the country which invites intervention by foreign actors."<sup>121</sup> Michael Hudson shares this line of thought and maintains that "the fragmentation of Lebanon's political culture has two dimensions: one is socio-cultural and reflects the multiple, diverse, and often contradictory identifications of its peoples. The second derives from the area's vulnerability to and attraction for foreign political interests. The two are interrelated through the dynamics of internal security and external rivalries."<sup>122</sup> Fawaz further points out that the Lebanese state is not a natural entity: while it is a territorial state, it is not a nation-state. There are deep cultural divisions between the

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<sup>119</sup> Before the war, the ratio of Christian to Muslim in government offices was 6:5 based on the presumption that the Christians constituted a majority.

<sup>120</sup> Michael C. Hudson, *The Precarious Republic: Modernization in Lebanon* (New York: Random House, 1968).

<sup>121</sup> Adnan Fawaz, "The Lebanese Predicament," *Conference Speech*, Lebanese American University, November 1998.

<sup>122</sup> Michael C. Hudson, *The Precarious Republic*, 17.

groups that compose the social system to the extent that it is almost impossible for them to interact in depth. The nature of this plurality necessitates a political system that provides the necessary mechanisms that will regulate the relationships among the groups and make the consequences of their interactions predictable."<sup>123</sup> In other words, the reason why the consociational system has not succeeded at preventing conflict is not because it is sectarian; it is because the disagreements among the various sects, which, although political on the surface, are rooted in identity struggles. As will be demonstrated, the Lebanese plural democracy is the byproduct of three interrelated phenomena: a plural society regulated by social sectarianism; a plural polity, regulated by consociationalism, and geopolitical factors that interfere with the first two. A good way to grasp the nature of this plural democracy is by, first, understanding the divergent outlooks of its main communities—the Maronites, the Sunnis, and the Shiites—and how these have defined inter-sectarian relations and impacted the fate of Lebanon.

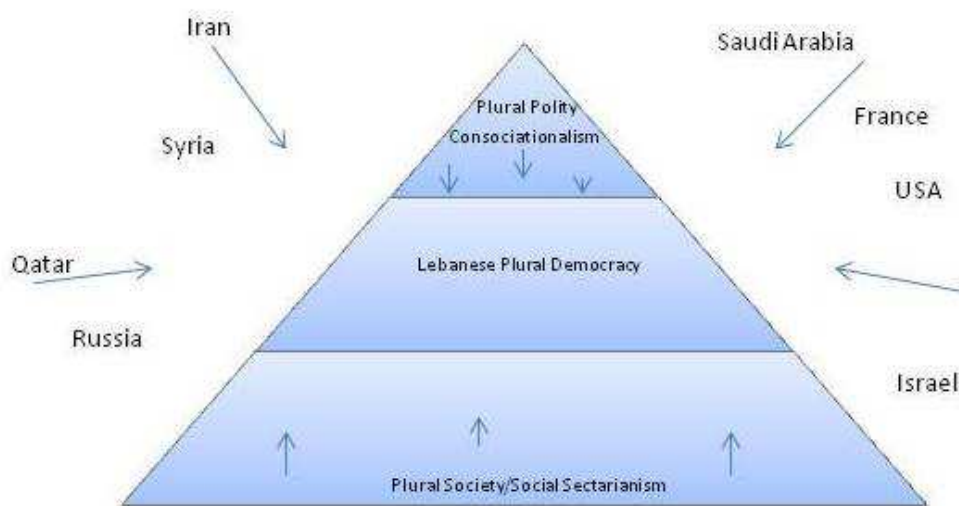


Figure 1: The Lebanese Plural Democracy

<sup>123</sup> Adnan Fawaz, "The Lebanese Predicament."



### 2.1.1 *The Ihbat (frustration) of the Maronites*

As the largest Christian community who has traditionally played the leading role in Lebanese politics, the Maronites, as all Christians in post-civil war Lebanon, bemoan their marginalization as a minority caught between Sunni and Shiite powers and rivalries. Despite the fact that their cultural and economic influence has not withered, the Christians, and the Maronites specifically, have repeatedly complained of *Ihbat* (frustration)—a state resulting from the loss of the political predominance they once enjoyed. The decline in their power began with the end of the civil war and the signing of the Taef Agreement. It was not only that the Agreement reduced their constitutional powers; it was also Syria's domination of Lebanon that excluded anti-Syrian Christians. Throughout all the period of its domination of Lebanon, Syria established loyal puppet Lebanese governments who would defer to Damascus on all political and economic matters. All Maronite presidents during the Syrian hegemony over Lebanon bowed to Syrian orders. Popular leaders within the Maronite community who rejected Syria's domination of Lebanon were suppressed: Samir Geagea, the leader of the Lebanese Forces, was incarcerated, and Michel Aoun, an army general who attempted to "liberate" Lebanon from Syria by force in 1989, was sent into exile. The political elite that operated at the time did not represent true Maronite aspirations.<sup>124</sup> Even after Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, the Christians' relatively diminished role persisted. It was mostly the result of divisions within their own ranks which have considerably weakened their status and role vis-à-vis other sects. While the Maronites follow several leaders, the main polarization is between followers of Geagea and followers of Aoun. The animosity between these two poles has divided Christians of the post-Syrian era: Geagea and his

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<sup>124</sup> Tom Pierre Najem, "Lebanon's Renaissance: The Political Economy of Reconstruction (United Kingdom: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2000), 224.

followers have joined the anti-Syrian, March 14 alliance, and Aoun and his followers have joined the pro-Syrian, March 8 alliance, headed by Hezbollah.

The Christian *Ihbat* also stems from existential fears associated with their dwindling numbers in relation to the Sunnis and Shiites and the power shifts in favor of the latter. Some of them are so fearful for the loss of their identity that they are even proposing to revive the language they spoke in their antiquity, Syriac, or "the language of Christ."<sup>125</sup> The Maronites find it hard to come to terms with the fact they are no longer the most powerful group they once were. The early manifestations of their power began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly after 1860, when they ruled Mount Lebanon under the supremacy of the Ottoman Empire. Their role increased during the French mandate as they were the French's most favored group. In fact, the Maronites were the ones who lobbied for the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920. They saw the state of Lebanon as an extension of their power already established in Mount Lebanon, almost disregarding the fact the Greater Lebanon, unlike Mount Lebanon, now had areas with Sunni and Shiite predominance.

The Maronites' conception of Lebanon did not historically coincide with that of their Muslim counterparts. After the creation of Greater Lebanon, they wanted their state to be distinctively Lebanese, not part of Syria. As Kamal Salibi explains, the Maronites wanted a Lebanon "under their paramount control, separate, distinct, and independent from the rest of Syria."<sup>126</sup> They did not want to treat the Muslims as their political equals because they believed the Muslims, in Salibi's words, "were naturally susceptible to the strong influence of their co-religionists in other Arab countries and could therefore not be trusted in the more sensitive political and administrative positions in Lebanon, such as those which involved national security and ultimate

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<sup>125</sup> Justin Salhani, "Can a Dying Language Revive Lebanon's Christian Population?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 7, 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 25.

decision making."<sup>127</sup> This stress on Lebanese particularism as opposed to Arabism angered the Maronites' main rivals at the time, the Sunnis, who had tenaciously defined their identity and the history of their country as being part of a broader Arab and Islamic history.<sup>128</sup>

The discourse of Lebanese particularism also emerged from the conviction among Maronites (and other Christians) that they are not Arab, but of Phoenician descent with a Greco-Roman heritage that precedes Arab history by thousands of years.<sup>129</sup> Their refusal to be associated with an Arab heritage is mainly due to the connection between Arabism and Islam.<sup>130</sup> This partly explains the good relations they have historically built with the Western world, particularly the Vatican and France, whom they call "the tender mother."<sup>131</sup>

This stress on Lebanese particularism is also partly associated with the idea that Lebanon has always been a haven for persecuted religious minorities. The Christians' view of Lebanese nationhood, as John Entelis maintains, is "the constant identification of Lebanon as a place of refuge, a territorial enclave serving to protect the oriental Christians from Muslim attempts to subjugate and disperse them."<sup>132</sup> The continuous feeling of persecution was a "unifying link" between the Christian sects in Lebanon. Entelis explains that because the Maronites were the largest group that had identifiable patterns of community consciousness, they were able to "initiate and inspire a generally acceptable nationalist ideology among Christians."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> James Minihan, *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations*, 1196. Originally known as the Canaanites, the Phoenicians were navigators and traders in the Mediterranean Sea. Under the rule of Babylon, Assyria, the Greeks, Selucids, Romans and Byzantines, the region became a patchwork of cultures and languages. By the third century A.D., the majority of the inhabitants were Christians.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> "Who Are The Maronites?" *BBC News*, August 6, 2007.

<sup>132</sup> John P. Entelis, *Pluralism and Party Transformation in Lebanon: Al-Kataib 1936-1970* (Leiden: the Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1974), 32.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

The loss of political prerogatives has not prevented the Christians, in general, and the Maronites, in particular, from retaining considerable influence and an important role both domestically and internationally. In the midst of Sunni-Shiite rivalries in Lebanon, the Maronites are the catalyst that keeps the balance of power or tips it in favor of one group or the other. As will be shown in later paragraphs, the Maronites are divided in their alliances between the Sunnis and the Shiites. These alliances are not only based on strategic political and electoral considerations; they are also associated with fears stemming from the rise of Sunni fundamentalism, particularly in the course of the Arab Spring, and the rise of Shiite Iran and the extension of its power into Lebanon.

### ***2.1.2 The "Persecution" of the Sunnis***

Despite being the dominant group in the Middle East and playing a prominent role in Lebanese politics, the Sunnis have complained of humiliation and marginalization, particularly since 2005, the year their influential leader, Rafik Hariri, was assassinated.<sup>134</sup> They have accused the Syrian regime, ruled by Bashar Al-Assad, and its Lebanese ally, Hezbollah, of perpetrating the crime. This, along with attempts by Hezbollah to weaken their power in Lebanon, has alienated many Sunnis and triggered sporadic fights with Shiites across Lebanon, which have intensified since the beginning of the war in neighboring Syria. Despite the Sunnis' historical association with a broader Arab and Syrian identity, the Sunnis are divided today between those whose loyalty to Syria abides and those who see themselves as belonging to Lebanon as an entity separate from Syria. The Hariri-Sunnis' slogan today is "Lebanon first." Some even say that the Sunnis have "Lebanized themselves."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> "Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni Community and Hariri's Future Current," *Middle East Report* 96, May 26, 2010.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

The Sunnis' relationship with a segment of the Christians improved after Hariri's assassination.<sup>136</sup> The two communities, who had historically disagreed over Lebanon's relation to Syria, have, for the first time, converged on a common cause: that Lebanon should be free from Syrian intervention. This relative solidarity had not been experienced in the past. Prior to 1920, the Sunnis, unlike Maronites, Druze, and Shiites, were privileged subjects of the Ottoman state. They were not involved in the communal Maronite-Druze politics of Mount Lebanon as they had mainly inhabited the interior and coastal cities of Beirut, Sidon, and Tripoli. It was only after the creation of Greater Lebanon that they experienced communal and political coexistence. They and the Maronites had not only divergent political outlooks; they also had, in Farid El-Khazen's words, "a radically different historical development both as rulers and ruled."<sup>137</sup> The Sunnis could not see themselves detached from Syria, as their interests, with rising Maronite dominance, were jeopardized. This explains Maronite-Sunni rivalry during the mandate period. Until the early 1940s, the Sunnis had been persistent in their call to incorporate the territories that were annexed to Greater Lebanon into Syria. However, their call was temporarily put on hold when they agreed with their Christian counterparts on the National Pact.<sup>138</sup>

While both communities had agreed that Lebanon was a country with an "Arab face," they did not necessarily agree over the content of Arabism. For the Christians, it was enough for Lebanon to have an "Arab face;" for the Sunnis, it depended on how Arabism was defined by pan-Arab leaders. The rise of Nasserism in the 1950s, for example, disrupted the status quo in almost all Arab countries, and many Sunnis in Lebanon wanted to unite with Egypt and Syria

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<sup>136</sup> The Lebanese Forces and the Phalanges are leading Maronite parties in Lebanon. They are allied with the Sunni-led Future Movement. This stands in contrast to the civil war period, when Sunnis and Maronites were enemies.

<sup>137</sup> Farid El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon* (New York: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2000), 37.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

under the framework of a United Arab Republic.<sup>139</sup> It was not surprising that the Sunnis sided with the Palestinians in the Lebanese civil war and supported Syrian hegemony over Lebanon in the post-Taef period.

The change in the Sunnis' outlook resulted from a strong conviction among the majority of them that the Syrian regime was behind the assassination of Hariri. For the first time since the end of the Lebanese civil war, the Sunnis were adamant to see an end to Syria's military and political role in Lebanon. The shared hostility toward Syria created a rapprochement between Sunnis and Christians opposed to Syria, which was translated into an alliance between the Future Movement, led by Hariri's son, Saad Hariri, and major Christian parties, such as Geagea's Lebanese Forces and the Phalanges party. However, this alliance excludes the significant Christian group led by Michel Aoun. In fact, Aoun and his followers are, along with Hezbollah, the Hariri Sunnis' main opponents.

Despising the Syrian regime and fearing the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon as an extension of Iranian power, the Lebanese Sunnis saw the Arab Spring as an opening to assert their power. Paul Salem contends that Sunnis "saw the uprising in Syria as an opportunity not only to support fellow Sunnis to rise up against a regime dominated by Alawites that had politically marginalized Syria's Sunnis, but also to bring down a regional power that stood behind Hezbollah's power in Lebanon."<sup>140</sup> Their discontent with the Syrian regime and Hezbollah has taken more radical manifestations through the rise of Salafists, who have joined their fellow Sunnis in Syria in their war against the Alawite regime, and who are believed to receive funding from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.<sup>141</sup> Robert Rabil argues that, "By operating freely in northern Lebanon, Salafists have in-

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<sup>139</sup> El-Khazen, 37.

<sup>140</sup> Paul Salem, "Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 11, 2012.

<sup>141</sup> Robert G. Rabil, "Salafists Rise in Syria," *The National Interest*, August 7, 2012

creased their political power among Sunnis by standing out as the most potent group supporting the [Syrian] opposition."<sup>142</sup> This has backfired in Lebanon, where episodes of Sunni-Shiites clashes have repeatedly taken place. Salafists do not only antagonize Shiites; they also alarm Christians, who fear that the rise of Sunni fundamentalism in Syria would have repercussions in Lebanon.<sup>143</sup> Such fears become stronger when Sunnis, such as Ahmad Kassas, the speaker of the Sunni Islamic Freedom Party, openly states: "What is Lebanon but a small part of the land of Damascus...no one will stop us from joining our Damascus that sheltered us and sheltered you through the ages."<sup>144</sup> Or when inhabitants of the Sunni-dominated city of Bab Al-Tebbaneh in North Lebanon, proudly state: "To us, Lebanon remains an artificial construct with which we simply could not identify."<sup>145</sup> Moreover, the close relationship between the Sunnis of Lebanon and Saudi Arabia alarms Christians, who see it as an extension of Saudi influence and culture into Lebanon; and Shiites, who see Saudi power as a threat to their guardian and sponsor, Iran.<sup>146</sup>

### ***2.1.3 The Rise to Power of the Shiites***

Since the end of the civil war in 1990 and Syria's seizing of power in Lebanon, the Shiites' ascendance to the Lebanese throne has been in crescendo. Their enhanced role in Lebanese politics contrasts with earlier years when they were the most neglected, underrepresented, and marginalized group in Lebanon. During the mandate and independence years, they were, in the words of Martin Kramer, "the despised stepchildren of a state governed by (and for) Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims."<sup>147</sup> However, their state of submission was reversed when influential leaders and clerics, most notably the Iran-born Imam Musa Al-Sadr, succeeded at mobiliz-

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Alice Fordham, "Smell of Freedom Reaches Lebanon," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2012.

<sup>144</sup> OTV News Bulletin, February 21, 2013.

<sup>145</sup> "Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni Community and Hariri's Future Current," *Middle East Report* 96, May 26, 2010.

<sup>146</sup> Joshua Crase and Marl Huband, eds., *The Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: C Hurst & Co Ltd, 2009): 105.

<sup>147</sup> Martin Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 211.

ing them. Al-Sadr was the prime mover behind Shiite awakening in Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s and the founder of the Amal movement (Hope), now headed by the Shiite speaker of parliament, Nabih Berri. Al-Sadr was able to transition the Shiites from political isolationism into political involvement.<sup>148</sup> While their mobilization was initially intended to make them partake in the Lebanese body politic, some Shiites were influenced by the 1979 Iranian revolution and opted for a more radical route. They joined Hezbollah, the Islamic party founded in 1982 with the help of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Fouad Ajami points out that the Shiites "had always maintained cultural and religious traffic between the hinterland of Shiite Lebanon and Persia."<sup>149</sup> Hezbollah's adversaries even accuse them of aiming to establish the *Wilayat Al-Faqih* (the guardianship of the jurist) in Lebanon— a concept advanced by Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1970s and constitutes today the basis of the constitution in Iran. According to this concept, people are to be ruled by a *Faqih* (jurist) or a number of jurists who act as custodians over the people while awaiting the return of Imam Mahdi.<sup>150</sup> The jurist is the supreme leader in the country and rules on all aspects of life including governance of the country. The Shiite's awaiting of their revered Imam is a manifestation of the feeling of persecution that has continuously shaped their culture. Before the creation of the Greater Lebanon, the Shiites found refuge in Mount Lebanon, escaping persecution by Sunnis.<sup>151</sup> Their main break with the Sunnis dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and was the result of a feud over the leadership of the Muslim Umma. The Shiites believe that the Sunnis stripped them of their legitimate right to rule, as they consider themselves to be the direct descendents of the Prophet. Kramer describes the legacy of Shi'ism as one of "martyrdom and

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<sup>148</sup> Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: from Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Macmillan, 2009), 53.

<sup>149</sup> Fouad Ajami, "Lebanon and its Inheritors," *Foreign Affairs* 63 no.4 (1985): 782.

<sup>150</sup> Imam Mahdi is the Twelver Shiites' awaited Imam, who is said to have disappeared into cosmic occultation and is expected to return at the end of the time.

<sup>151</sup> Yusri Harzan, "The Rise of Politicized Shiite Religiosity and the Territorial State in Iraq and Lebanon," *The Middle East Journal* 64, No. 4 (2010): 525.



suffering, resting on an ancient grievance: the belief that Islamic history was derailed when political power passed out from the hands of the family of the Prophet Mohammed."<sup>152</sup> Constant persecution in the past led the Shiites into a state of "melancholic introspection" or persecution complex. As they did not approve of the rule of Sunni Muslims, they have been awaiting the God-sent change which should materialize with the coming of Imam Mahdi, who will be "sinless" and will bring justice to the world. To protect themselves against orthodox Sunni rule, the Shiites had historically practiced *Takiyya* (dissimulation), by accepting the doctrine in public but rejecting it in private.<sup>153</sup>

What mostly boosted Hezbollah's confidence in Lebanon has been its armed resistance of the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. Unlike other Lebanese militias who were forced to disband after the civil war, Hezbollah was allowed to keep its arms by virtue of the Taef Agreement and was transformed from a militia into a legitimate "resistance." The party succeeded at driving the Israelis out of Lebanon in 2000 after 18 years of occupation. Another war with Israel in 2006, although devastating to Lebanon, gave the Islamic party another boost while alarming other Lebanese groups. With Syrian and Iranian backing, Hezbollah became powerful militarily and politically. The strategic connection between Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran has been geared toward containing and fighting local, regional and international foes such as the anti-Hezbollah groups in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and France, believed to be intent on defeating the Syrian-Iran-Hezbollah axis.<sup>154</sup> The rise in Hezbollah's military strength, its political bargaining power, and its close relation with Iran and Syria have antagonized the majority of the Sunnis, the

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<sup>152</sup>Kramer, 211. The Sunnis, who grew more powerful, and who ruled in various dynasties, established in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the principles of Orthodox Islam, recognizing only four schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Those who did not adhere to those schools were considered heretical sects and were viewed in an apprehensive manner. As the Shiites did not adhere to any of these schools, they were considered heretics.

<sup>153</sup> Nabil Jabbut, *The Rumbling Volcano: Islamic Fundamentalism in Egypt* (Pasadena, CA: Mandate Press, 1993), 54.

<sup>154</sup> "A Precarious Balancing Act: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict," *Middle East Report* 132, November 22, 2012, 9.

Maronites, and the Druze, who see Hezbollah's power as an extension of Iran's influence in the region. In showing its commitment to its allies and fear over its very existence, Hezbollah has joined the war in Syria to fight along the Alawite Syrian regime against the Sunni-led Syrian opposition.<sup>155</sup>

The Lebanese communities were not only divided before and during the civil war; their divisions were evident during the Syrian hegemony over Lebanon. The majority of Christians were opposed to Syria's dictatorial maneuvering of Lebanese affairs while the majority of Muslims—Sunnis, Shiites, and Druze, were, on the whole, supportive of Syria's role in Lebanon.<sup>156</sup> Their discourse justified Syria's role in Lebanon and the region as the pioneer of Arabism and the drive of the resistance against Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people. Syria gave Hezbollah in Lebanon the green light to conduct operations against Israel. It facilitated the passage of weapons which the Islamic party received from Iran. Although the rise in Hezbollah's power was alarming to the other sects, it was not a subject for discussion at the time, as Lebanon's politics—the election of the president, the parliament, the formation of the cabinet, and Lebanon's foreign policy—was a Syrian decision.<sup>157</sup>

As demonstrated in the above section, the Maronites, the Sunnis, and the Shiites have had divergent outlooks since they formed a state. While the consociational structure of the Lebanese polity has been crucial in preventing a total breakdown of the state in times of conflict, it has not led to lasting peace or to social integration. The problem, however, lay not primarily in the consociational formula but in incompatible identity narratives among the sects. The fragmented political culture resulting from the divergence in outlooks prevented allegiance to a strong state; instead, people across sects owed allegiance to leaders and warlords from within their own

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>156</sup> See Nicholas Blandford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

communities. The prominence of these leaders and their influential role in persuading followers is a phenomenon very specific to Lebanese culture, which has been in practice since feudal times. Known in the Lebanese dictionary as clientelism, this relationship between patron and follower is based on the former providing services in return for the latter's loyalty. Types of clientelism include *Zu'ama* clientelism, where leaders have inherited their status from their prominent political and sectarian families; party-led clientelism, where loyalty is to a political party or militia; and Islamist communitarian clientelism, where Islamic leaders win followers' support by providing services and creating, through religion, a stronger sense of belonging to the same community.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, the shaky plural sociopolitical system operating in an extremely volatile environment has invited foreign intervention in Lebanese affairs—a factor which has been detrimental to Lebanon's stability. The reason why foreign intervention was possible was because foreign powers could use Lebanese groups who identify with them religiously, culturally, or ideologically in the promotion of their own interests. Throughout Lebanon's past and present, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, the PLO, Israel, France, the United States, Iran and Russia have intervened in Lebanese affairs and have pitted Lebanese groups against each other. As Maroun Keserwani maintains, "In nearly all cases, Lebanese discord has been used by external powers, in one way or another, to serve diverse aims which have little to do with the Lebanese themselves. Factors within the Lebanese society have always been there not only to produce conflict, but also to encourage and even invite outside intervention in Lebanese affairs."<sup>159</sup> As will be shown in the next paragraphs, the period that ensued after Rafik Hariri's assassination was yet another critical, even dangerous, episode in Lebanon's saga of plural politics of the post-Syrian era.

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<sup>158</sup> Nizar Hamzeh, "Clientalism in Lebanon: Roots and Trends," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 3, (2001): 167-178.

<sup>159</sup> Maroun Keserwani, "Foreign Interference and Religious Animosity in Lebanon," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, No. 4, (1980): 685.

**Table 1. The Three Main Sects**

<b>Maronites</b>	<b>Sunnis</b>	<b>Shiites</b>
Generally Pro-West	Generally Pro-Saudi Arabia	Generally Pro-Syria, Iran
See Lebanon as having a "Lebanese" identity	Have traditionally conceived Lebanon as "part of Syria"	Are culturally, politically, ideologically, religiously and strategically connected with Iran and Syria
Their power declined in the post-civil war period	After Hariri's assassination, they became divided between loyalists and opponents to the Syrian regime	Most important player: Hezbollah led by Hassan Nasrallah
Retain strong political, cultural and economic influence	Important leaders include Rafik Hariri and his son, Saad Hariri	Their relationship with Sunnis deteriorated after Hariri's assassination
Divided between pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian alliances	Accuse Hezbollah and the Syrian regime of undermining their community	Are competing with Sunnis for power
Rival leaders include Michel Aoun allied with Hezbollah; Samir Geagea, allied with the pro-Hariri Future Movement	Have joined co-religionists in fighting against the Syrian regime	Have joined their co-religionists in Syria in fighting against the Syrian, Sunni-led opposition
Fear rising Islamic fundamentalism, particularly radical Sunni movements		

## **2.2. The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and the March 8, March 14 Divide**

On February 14, 2005, Rafik Hariri, an influential Sunni leader and prime minister, was assassinated along 21 others in a massive car bomb in Beirut. Thousands of angry people of all sects and political affiliations converged on Martyrs' Square in Downtown Beirut to protest the crime. It was the beginning of a chain of demonstrations that unfolded over several weeks, known as the "Beirut Spring," or the "Cedar Revolution." For the first time since the end of the civil war, Lebanese Christians and Muslims were united against a common "enemy:" the Syrian regime. They raised Lebanese flags and banners reading *Hurriya, Siyada, Istiklal* (freedom, sov-

ereignty, independence) and *Haqiqa, Hurriya, Wihda Wataniya* (truth, freedom, national unity). They demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, the formation of a new government free from Syrian intervention, and an international investigation into the Hariri's assassination. The popular outrage coupled with international pressure on Damascus prompted the Syrians to withdraw on April 26, 2005.

While the fervor for independence was unprecedented, the hope for national unity was short lived. In retaliation for the Beirut Spring demonstrations, Hezbollah organized a massive rally on March 8, 2005, where supporters of the Islamic party vowed their abiding loyalty to Syria. Thousands of protestors held pictures of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and placards reading, "No for the American Intervention." They accused America and Israel of meddling in Lebanese affairs, implicitly accusing them of the crime. This impelled the anti-Syrian camp to organize a counter-demonstration on March 14, 2005, reiterating their fierce condemnation of Syria and insisting on an international inquiry into Hariri's assassination. The outcome of these demonstrations was a clear polarity between two camps: a pro-Syrian camp, known as the March 8 alliance, and an anti-Syrian, Western-backed, camp, known as the March 14 alliance.<sup>160</sup> As will be shown in later chapters, this polarity does not only define the political climate in Lebanon, but also—and largely so—its media climate.

The pro-Syrian, anti-Syrian polarization was also reflected in public opinion polls. Eighty-six percent of Maronite citizens interviewed a month after the assassination said they were convinced that the Syrian regime orchestrated Hariri's assassination. This was followed by

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<sup>160</sup> The March 8 alliance is a pro-Syrian coalition of parties led by Hezbollah. Main parties include the Free Patriotic Movement, led by Maronite leader Michel Aoun, the Amal Movement, led by Shiite leader Nabih Berri, the Progressive Socialist Party, led by Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, and the Marada Movement, led by Maronite leader Suleiman Franjeh. The March 14 alliance is a coalition of anti-Syrian parties and independents led by the Hariri's Future Movement. Main parties include the Lebanese Forces, led by Maronite leader Samir Geagea, the Phalanges Party, led by Maronite leaders Amine and Sami Gemayel, among others.

80 percent, Druze, and 49 percent, Sunnis. Only 9.4 percent of the Shiites accused Syria of the crime. Instead, they were convinced that Israeli and American intelligence services were behind it.<sup>161</sup>

Irrespective of public opinion or personal conviction, political and sectarian leaders joined alliances that secured their role and position in the political equation. Michel Aoun, once the most vitriolic critic of Syria and Hezbollah, sided with the March 8 alliance hoping that such a move would weaken his Christian and Sunni opponents and boost his position as a Christian leader. Hezbollah, on the other hand, needed a powerful Christian ally to weaken his political adversaries in the March 14 alliance. The Hezbollah-Aoun alliance had no ideological grounds; it was merely a settlement that would serve the interest of both parties.<sup>162</sup> Similarly, the Lebanese Forces and the Phalanges joined an alliance with the Sunnis, once their most vicious enemies. However, the alliance was possible because Hariri's assassination presented them with a common enemy. The Druzes, led by Walid Jumblatt, have bounced back and forth between the coalitions and have settled with the March 8 group.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> <http://www.beirutcenter.info/Default.asp?ContentID=640&menuID=46>

<sup>162</sup> "Lebanese Elections Part 1: Understanding the Politics," Stratfor Analysis, June 1, 2009

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

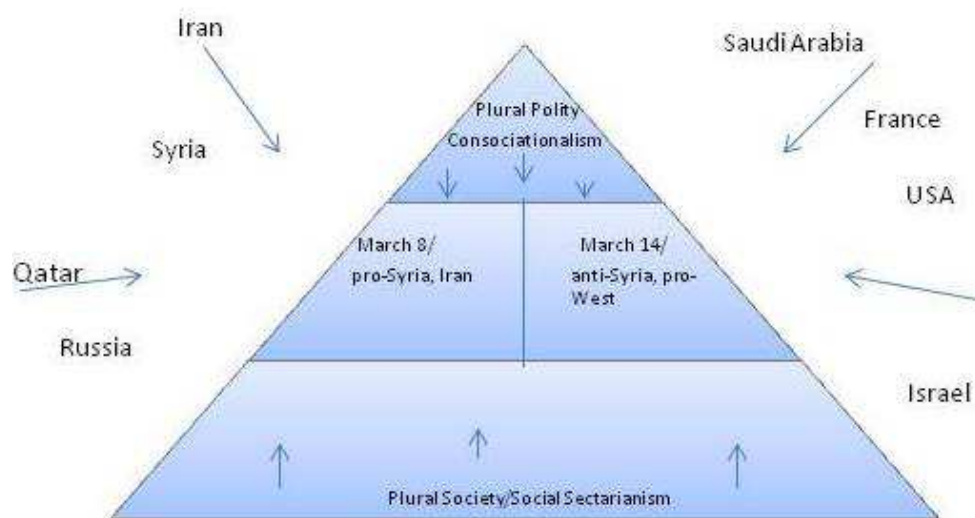


Figure 2: The March 18, March 8 Divide

The events that have unfolded in the eight years since Hariri's assassination have only exacerbated the March 8-March 14 divide.<sup>164</sup> Between 2005 and 2012, at least ten anti-Syrian Christian and Muslim politicians were assassinated in car bombs, increasing the apprehension of Syria and Hezbollah.<sup>165</sup> A war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006 caused the death of more than one thousand civilians and severe destruction of the country's infrastructure—a fact which alienated the March 14 camp, who accused Hezbollah of acting unilaterally and dragging the country into war. In 2008, clashes between Sunnis and Shiites left one hundred people dead.<sup>166</sup> In 2011, Hezbollah ministers and their allies toppled the government headed by Hariri's son, Saad Hariri, and imposed a government headed by a Hezbollah ally—a move which angered pro-Hariri Sunnis, leading to protests against the Hezbollah-led government.<sup>167</sup> The rift between the

<sup>164</sup> Clancy Chassy, "The Great Divide in the Middle East: How the Lebanese Media has Set Aside Differences of Opinion," *The Independent*, August 7, 2006

<sup>165</sup> "Timeline: Events in Lebanon since Hariri's Killing," *Reuters*, December 12, 2007.

<sup>166</sup> Nada Bakri, "Clashes between Shiites and Sunnis Intensify in Beirut," *The New York Times*, May 9, 2008.

<sup>167</sup> "Lebanon's Road to Crisis," *The Telegraph*, January 25, 2011.

two camps deepened further after a United Nations-backed international tribunal implicated four suspects in Hariri's assassination—all connected to Hezbollah.<sup>168</sup>

### **2.3 The Association with the Syrian War and Sunni-Shiite Hostilities**

Amid this polarization, the Syrian war presented an opportunity for Lebanese Shiites and Sunnis to push their political and existential battles beyond the Lebanese borders. Despite the decision of the Lebanese government to remain neutral vis-à-vis the Syrian conflict, Sunnis and Shiites from Lebanon have been reported to be crossing the border into Syria to fight along their respective communities. Each sect has power brokers: the Syrian regime and Hezbollah are backed by Iran, while the Sunni opposition is backed by Sunni powers including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.<sup>169</sup> This has exacerbated tensions between the two communities in Lebanon, and they have been fighting each other in several areas of the country, including Tripoli, Sidon, and Beirut.

Hezbollah acknowledged that the Islamic party is fighting in Syria "to protect the 30,000 Lebanese Shiites who live in the border region"<sup>170</sup> and that Hezbollah "has an obligation to train and arm Lebanese citizens residing in Syria to prevent their displacement to Lebanon."<sup>171</sup> Some have even described the Sunni-Shiite fight as "existential." The Syrian opposition has accused Hezbollah of pushing the Sunnis away from the border "to create a sectarian enclave linking the Shiite villages to the traditional Alawite heartland in Western Syria," while Syrian Shiites at the border voiced fears from radical Sunnis fighting in the Syrian opposition.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> "Hezbollah Suspects to be Tried over Rafik Hariri," *BBC News*, August 17, 2011.

<sup>169</sup> Babak Dehghanpisheh, "Lebanese Fight on Both Sides of Conflict in Syria," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2013.

<sup>170</sup> Mona Alami, "Hezbollah Takes a Greater Role in Syrian Conflict," *USA Today*, March 5, 2013.

<sup>171</sup> "Hezbollah, Syria Seek to Relieve Pressure by Spreading Conflict to Lebanon," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 11, 2013.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*



Experts have interpreted Hezbollah's behavior as prompted by fear over its very existence. A report by the International Crisis Group states that "Hezbollah views any threat to the Assad regime as a threat directed at its principal ally, Iran. [it is] a country without which Tehran's ability to supply the Shiite movement would be severely constrained."<sup>173</sup>

On the other hand, Sunni militant groups from Lebanon have provided the Syrian opposition with weapons and logistical support. While the Hariri-led Future Movement has accused the Syrian regime and Hezbollah of "trying to push the Syrian conflict into Lebanon...by causing instability in Tripoli, Sidon and other regions,"<sup>174</sup> the Sunnis are betting on the eventual fall of the Syrian regime, which would weaken Hezbollah considerably and boost the March 14 alliance. The Future Movement will also benefit from the fall of Syria on the regional level: in their logic, it will result in "a rupture in the Syrian-Iranian axis, stretching from Iran to Iraq, to (Alawite) Syria to Lebanon; a brake on Tehran's ability to reach into the Arab world; and the reemergence of Saudi Arabia—the party's main benefactor—a key player in Lebanon."<sup>175</sup> The Sunnis see the Syrian war as "a gift from heaven," because it represents "the beginning of the end of an implacable foe held responsible for the Sunni community's historical decline as well as for the assassination of their leader Rafik Hariri."<sup>176</sup>

The association of Sunnis and Shiites with the Syrian war has put the Christians in both alliances in a difficult position. Aoun, Hezbollah's ally, has adopted an anti-Sunni rhetoric and described the fall of the Assad regime as the "fall of democracy" of which "Christians will be the first victims."<sup>177</sup> This is the stance that Aoun followers have adopted. An interview by International Crisis Group with one Aoun supporter echoes his leader's logic: "The Syrian regime halt-

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<sup>173</sup> "A Precarious Balancing Act," 10.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>177</sup> "Aoun: Christians will be the First Victims of the Fall of the Syrian Regime," *Lebanon Files*, July 26, 2012.

ed Sunni aspirations in Lebanon. If Sunnis were to rule Syria, they would ally themselves with those in Lebanon. Nothing would then stop Sunni domination over the country."<sup>178</sup>

Hezbollah has benefited from these fears and used the opportunity to exacerbate them by depicting its immediate Sunni opponent, the Future Movement, as harboring Islamic fundamentalists. An International Crisis Group interview with Hezbollah officials confirms this: "The Future Movement has contributed to transforming moderate Islamists into extremists, rebellious against the state, and defiant of other communities."<sup>179</sup>

The Future Movement has expressed strong political solidarity with the Syrian opposition and adopted a very strong rhetorical stand against the regime. While the group has denied providing military assistance to the Syrian rebels, reports have circulated that Future Movement representatives are using Turkey as "a substitute arena for the support of Syrian armed groups." Reports say that Future Movement representatives have visited Ankara to oversee the distribution of weapons.<sup>180</sup> While Christians allied with the March 14 may also fear Sunni extremism, their leaders justify it as a reaction to Shiite extremism. Sami Gemayel, of the Christian Phalanges party opposed to Hezbollah, said the militancy of Salafists is "a natural reaction to Hezbollah's arms."<sup>181</sup>

The divisions between the March 8 and March 14 camps, the association of Sunnis and Shiites with the Syrian war, and rising tensions between Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon, have acted collectively to undermine the stability of the Lebanese state and jeopardize inter-sectarian relations and "national unity." As demonstrated below, the divergent political outlooks of the various Lebanese sects are not compensated for on the social level. While the consociational

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<sup>178</sup> "A Precarious Balancing Act," 12.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>181</sup> "Gemayel: Sunni Extremism Natural Reaction to Hezbollah Arms," *Ya Libnan*, November 17, 2012.

government guarantees confessional representation on the political level, social sectarianism guarantees confessional autonomy on the socio-cultural level. Both act in unison to hamper social and national integration.

## 2.4 Social Sectarianism

Agencies of socialization in Lebanon, such as the family and the school, remain, to a large extent, sectarian. The debate over civil marriage legislation and the constant disagreement over the teaching of Lebanon's history are good examples that illustrate how political sectarianism and social sectarianism interact to hamper national integration. Ralf Crowe argues rightfully that "Any explanation of Lebanese politics will be incomplete unless the role of religious attitudes and organizations are taken in account. Even more, several aspects of the formal organization of government officially reflect the religious structure of the society."<sup>182</sup>

The Lebanese Constitution provides for personal status laws on marriage, divorce, custody, inheritance, etc. to be governed by religious institutions, not by the state.<sup>183</sup> This substantiates Crowe's argument that the "multi-religious societies in the Middle East have [for centuries] tended to be collections of semi-autonomous communities, each of which lived according to its own custom and frequently in a distinct fashion. Thus, religion became the primary carrier of values and determining a whole way of life."<sup>184</sup>

The question of civil marriage legislation reemerged in January 2013 triggering a nationwide debate after a Lebanese couple, a Sunni and a Shiite, decided to marry in a civil ceremony

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<sup>182</sup> Ralph E. Crowe, "Religious Sectarianism in the Lebanese Political System," *The Journal of Politics* 24, no. 3 (1962): 489.

<sup>183</sup> The Lebanese Constitution, Section 3.

<sup>184</sup> Crowe, p. 493.

by opting to remove their confessional identities from their civil status records.<sup>185</sup> While a notary was able to marry the couple, the state had, until April 25, 2013, refused to register the marriage. According to the Interior Minister, the problem was not about the marriage's legitimacy as much as it concerned a problem in society.<sup>186</sup> The problem the Interior Minister was referring to was the inability of the Lebanese government to pass legislation that would alienate religious leaders.

While the Maronite and Orthodox churches were, to varying degrees, more accommodating of civil marriage legislation, Muslim clerics, both Sunnis and Shiites, categorically opposed it.<sup>187</sup> The most vociferous condemnation of civil marriage came from the country's highest Sunni authority, Mufti Mohammed Rashid Qabbani, who called any Muslim who approves it an apostate. A more radical statement came from Salafists, who called civil marriage "adultery" and children of such marriage "illegitimate."<sup>188</sup> Shiite clerics voiced similar views to their Sunni counterparts. Lebanon's Higher Shiite Council expressed staunch refusal of the legislation, stating that, even it were an option, civil marriage would imply adopting a new system of governing personal status that would transcend sectarian lines—a requirement which would violate the accepted social ties between sects.<sup>189</sup> After much debate, the Interior Minister took the bold and unprecedented move and registered the marriage, making it legitimate. This move set a precedent which, theoretically, allows Lebanese people to marry civilly, only if they choose to remove their religious affiliation from their public records.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> According to Lebanese law, which is derived from the French mandate law of 1936, people may decide to marry civilly only if they choose not to belong to any sect.

<sup>186</sup> "Khouloud and Nidal's Civil Marriage Wins," *Lebanon National News Agency*, February 16, 2103.

<sup>187</sup> "Maronite Bishops: Those who Marry in Civil Union Must Complement it with Religious Ceremony," *Naharnet*, February 6, 2013. The Christian Orthodox church was accommodating of the law. While they said that they preferred a church marriage, they would support a law that would allow for optional civil marriage. The Maronite bishops said that while they would respect any civil law devised by the state, Christians would have to complement their civil marriage with a religious marriage.

<sup>188</sup> Jana El-Hassan, "Religious Leaders Split Over Civil Marriage," *The Daily Star*, February 2, 2013.

<sup>189</sup> "Higher Shiite Council Joins in Rejecting Civil Marriage," *The Daily Star*, February 1, 2013.

<sup>190</sup> "Lebanon's First Civil Marriage Registered, Agency Said," *Al-Arabiya*, April 25, 2013.

Why would a question as simple as civil marriage cause such a stir in Lebanon, a secular and modern country? Because if legalized, civil marriage would mean that the Lebanese state would, for the first time, recognize Lebanese citizens in a structure independent of religious affiliation. For some, this jeopardizes sectarian identity. In fact, the bride's family was the first to disapprove of her marriage, stating that "her actions did not reflect their own religious beliefs... as they are committed to what Islam says, particularly in terms of personal issues."<sup>191</sup>

Divisions over civil marriage run deeper than the religious leadership. Civil society groups have repeatedly gathered in Beirut's Martyrs' Square to voice their support for civil marriage<sup>192</sup> and resorted to social media to demand "more equal rights between men and women."<sup>193</sup> On the other hand, young people often give conflicting views on the matter. Some oppose the law as, in their words, "religion is our reference in life, whether Muslims or Christians;" that "the religious system should not be unnecessarily undermined." Others support reform, stressing the importance of religious coexistence and that "civil marriage eases reaching common grounds between Muslims and Christians."<sup>194</sup>

The varying views on civil marriage confirm that religiosity is a defining aspect of Lebanese culture. A study by the Beirut Center for Research revealed that 87 percent of the Lebanese people across confessions practiced their religious rituals and faith on a permanent or occasional basis. Moreover, the study showed that 72.8 percent voted in favor of religious courts as opposed to 12.8 percent who voted for civil courts.<sup>195</sup>

Michael Young, writing on his experiences in Beirut, mentions the "pervasiveness of the outwardly devotional, of public manifestations of faith...that religiosity seems everywhere pre-

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<sup>191</sup> "Bride's Family Rejects Her Battle with Civil Marriage in Lebanon," *The Daily Star*, January 26, 2013.

<sup>192</sup> Meritz Lutz, "Activists Hopeful of Civil Marriage Law Amendment," *The Daily Star*, February 5, 2013.

<sup>193</sup> Meritz Lutz, "Facebook Page Supporting Civil Marriage Goes Viral," *The Daily Star*, February 1, 2013.

<sup>194</sup> "Beirutis at Odds on Calls for Civil Marriage," *The Daily Star*, January 22, 2013.

<sup>195</sup> <http://www.beirutcenter.info/Default.asp?ContentID=738&menuID=46>, 2007

sent physically – on trinkets, lockets, wristbands, key rings, bumpers, pocket flashlights, lighters, and wherever else one can affix the image of a saint or a Quranic verse."<sup>196</sup> The dedication is surprisingly stronger among the youth. He explains that "the rise in overt Lebanese religiosity, like the rise in sectarian polarization, is one consequence of the breakdown of confidence in the state and its social contract." Moreover, it may be connected, especially among the Christians, to a "sense of communal decline."<sup>197</sup> Charles Harb, a psychology professor at the American University of Beirut, who specializes in identity and group dynamics, maintains that "these symbols are also there to declare or [to make statements] and perceive someone's identity with a particular group. It's a symptom of group division. The power and resources are based on sectarian alliance and group identity." In his view, people "claim space" by showing religious logos and stickers such as "King of Kings" in reference to Jesus Christ or stickers depicting Mecca.<sup>198</sup>

Just as the Lebanese family is sectarian, so, too, is the education system. As another important agency of political socialization, schools do not facilitate social integration. While public schools suffer from lack of resources and equipment, the majority of private schools are run by religious institutions that are attended by students of the same faith.<sup>199</sup> Christian schools, such as the Jesus and Mary School, aim, among others, to "nurture young men and women who are vessels of the Christian living faith."<sup>200</sup> Sunni schools, such as *Al-Iman* (The Faith), teach

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<sup>196</sup> Michael Young, "Finding God Everywhere in Lebanon," *The Daily Star*, January 5, 2012.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Brooke Anderson, "Religious Symbols: Taking Faith Too Far?" *The Daily Star*, February 14, 2013.

<sup>199</sup> Out of a total of 572 private religious schools, there are 256 Maronite schools, 15 Orthodox schools, 49 Catholic schools, 22 Armenian schools, 23 Evangelical schools, 102 Sunni schools, 86 Shiite schools, and 19 Druze schools. Source: <http://www.localiban.org/spip.php?article5190>

<sup>200</sup> Jesus and Mary School, Antonine Sisters School, Saint Joseph School, and the Armenian Evangelical College are Christian schools; Al-Iman High School is a Sunni school with branches across Sunni regions of North Lebanon, while Al-Mahdi school is a Shiite school with branches across villages of the South, Beirut and Beqaa. Each of these schools is keen on promoting the values of its faith.

[http://www.jmrab.edu.lb/eng/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=54](http://www.jmrab.edu.lb/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=54)

memorization of the Holy Quran and aim to spread religious, educational, and cultural quality.<sup>201</sup> Shiite schools, such as *Al-Imam* (The Imam), aims to spread the word and wisdom of Imam Mahdi and "work to embody his method intellectually and behaviorally...to lay the foundations of religious values and Islamic ethics in the Lebanese society."<sup>202</sup> Moreover, the failure of the education system to agree on a common history education curriculum across all schools has remained an obstacle to social and national integration. While historians have often disagreed as to the events that shaped Lebanon's ancient history, they disagree even more over Lebanon's more recent history, which extends from independence until the end of the civil war in 1990. In the words of the Minister of Education, "After more than 20 years...the teaching of history in Lebanon remains, as it has always been, subject to the interests of various political groups."<sup>203</sup> In fact, children learn their history from their parents and their communities, as the absence of a common curriculum makes reading Lebanon's history open to different interpretations. Studies show that students identify with historical figures from their own sectarian background.<sup>204</sup> Ohaness Goktchian, a professor of political science at the American University in Beirut, argues that children are being brought up indentifying themselves "with their communities and not their nation... History is what unites people. Without history we can't have unity."<sup>205</sup> Describing the Lebanese as a people lacking a collective memory, Lebanese historian Antoine Messara stresses the need for "one narrative," a "unified version of history." Goktchian maintains that the Lebanese did not share values and traditions and had an education system "which contributes to the divisions among us."<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> [http://www.jmrab.edu.lb/eng/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=54](http://www.jmrab.edu.lb/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=54)

<sup>202</sup> [http://www.almahdischools.org/newsite/\\_definition.php?filename=200708150908500](http://www.almahdischools.org/newsite/_definition.php?filename=200708150908500)

<sup>203</sup> Rima Maktabi, "Lebanon's Missing History: Why School Books Ignore the Past," *CNN*, June 8, 2012.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. Results from a survey of 3,000 Lebanese 14-year-olds conducted in 2007-8 found that the historical Lebanese figures children most strongly identified with were leaders from their own sectarian background.

<sup>205</sup> Natalia Antelava, "History Lessons Stymied in Lebanon," *BBC*, Wednesday, April 8, 2009.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

The intersection between social sectarianism and plural consociationalism has produced a sociopolitical structure which invites foreign intervention in Lebanese affairs and subjects the Lebanese democracy to constant precariousness. The sectarian consociational political system reflects a sectarian social system in which religious institutions are prominent and where sects are protective of their cultural identity and autonomy. The allegiance to communal leaders instead of the state renders the state weak and incapable of forcing decisions that contradict with the interests of the various sectarian groups.

Despite its frailty, the Lebanese plural democracy is the freest in the Arab world. What explains this freedom, Michael Young argues, is the sectarian system itself. In Young's words, "The sectarian system, its faults notwithstanding, has ensured that the society's parts are stronger than the state, and where the state is weak, individuals are usually freer to function."<sup>207</sup> Young maintains that while Lebanon is not the only sectarian country in the Middle East, it is the only country where the state is weaker than the religious communities. Where the state was stronger, like in Iraq or Syria, state ideologies were used as instruments of total control resulting in the suffocation of freedom.<sup>208</sup>

It is against this background that a study of the Lebanese media ought to take place. Because the media reflect the social and political environments within which they operate, it is important to understand the sociopolitical structures as well as the power dynamics that shape the Lebanese plural democracy and define the relationships among its various sects. The next chapters analyze the media within this framework: how consociationalism is reflected in the media; how divisions between the March 14 and March 8 alliances and their power brokers are translat-

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Michael Young, *The Ghosts of the Martyr's Square: An Eye Witness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2010), 26.



ed into media discourse; and how such discourse reflects identity struggles among the three main communities. The figure below illustrates the framework of analysis:

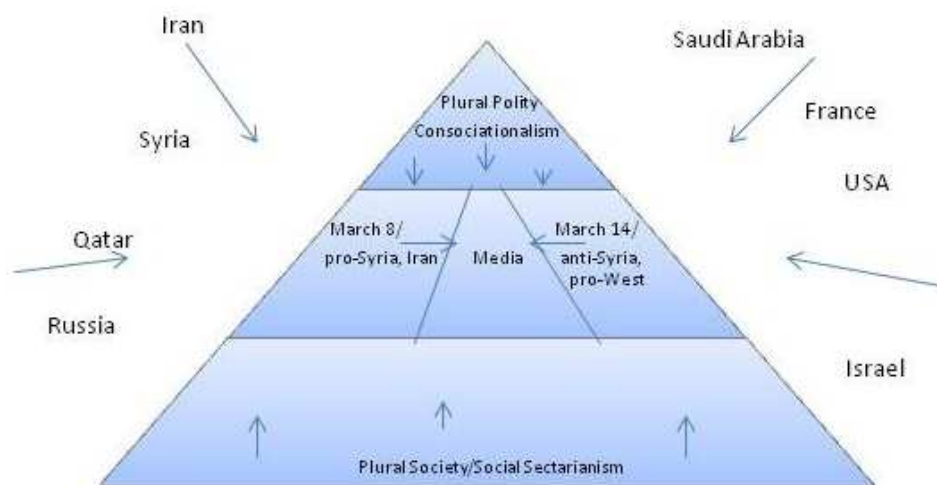


Figure 3. The Media in the Lebanese Sociopolitical Framework

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### CHAPTER 3: LEBANESE MEDIA PLURALISM AND THE POLITICO-SECTARIAN DIVIDE

Lebanon's plural sociopolitical system and the persistent foreign intervention in its domestic affairs have forged a mediascape whose nature is paradoxical. On the one hand, Lebanon stands out in the Arab world as the center of free expression, with a press, since its very beginning, serving as a platform for a multitude of voices and opinions.<sup>209</sup> Its television networks have provided forums for public debate, not to mention their highly diversified social and entertainment programs that cater to various audience tastes and needs, both terrestrially and through satellite.<sup>210</sup> On the other hand, both print and broadcast media in Lebanon often revert to sectarian discourse to the extent of threatening the country's political and social stability. In recurrent crises, the media become mired in political and sectarian feuds and serve as instruments of sectarian mobilization.<sup>211</sup>

Until the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the Lebanese media—the press specifically<sup>212</sup> were said to have been the vanguard of political, ideological, and cultural expression in the Arab world.<sup>213</sup> The late 19<sup>th</sup> century Lebanese polymath and founder of the Beirut Public Library, Viscount Philippe de Tarrazi, once described Lebanon as the true cradle of Arab journalism for be-

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<sup>209</sup> Shannon E. Martin, and David E. Copeland, eds., *The Function of Newspapers in Society: A Global Perspective* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers), 27.

<sup>210</sup> See Marwan Kraidy and Joe F. Khalil, "The Middle East: Transnational Arab Television," in *The Media Globe: Trends in International Mass Media*, eds., Lee Artz and Yahya R. Kamalipour (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).

<sup>211</sup> Paul Cochrane, "Lebanon's Media Battle," *Arab Media and Society* 6, fall 2008.

<sup>212</sup> The first television station in Lebanon (CLT), which was privately owned, was established in 1959. Another private television was established in 1962. Those were the only two stations operating before the civil war. When the war broke out, the two companies merged out of financial need and entered in a partnership with the government. They became Tele Liban in 1977, which became half owned by the government. In 1996, TL became completely government owned.

<sup>213</sup> Between 1962 and 1975, the Lebanese press passed through a very rich period: liberal laws were introduced which protected the press from administrative abuse. The press assumed a pan-Arab character. Foreign interest groups sought the Lebanese press to influence Arab masses. See Noha Mellor et al., *Arab Media* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 49.

ing, since the founding of the first daily *Hadikat Al-Akhbar* (The Garden of the News) in 1858, the center of abundant and diverse publications.<sup>214</sup>

During the civil war, Lebanese media took sides in supporting the warring Christian or Muslim factions and became heavily embroiled in the conflict to the point of incitement and propaganda. Right-leaning dailies, including *Annahar* (The day) and *Lisan El-Hal* (The Mouth-piece) and left-leaning dailies, such as *Assafir* (The Ambassador) and *Al-Muharrer* (The Editor), were said to have “transformed their allegiances to thinly disguised communal causes. The left-ists turned discreetly to championing the cause of the [pan-Arab, pro-Palestinian] Muslim community while the rightists turned into outright defenders of the [pan-Lebanese] Christian cause.”<sup>215</sup>

During the Syrian hegemony over Lebanon, from 1990 until 2005, Lebanese media were subjected to heavy censorship. Publishing critical news about Syria’s role in Lebanon was off limits to journalists, and in certain cases caused them to be arrested, fined, or their news outlets periodically suspended or closed.<sup>216</sup> Instead, the *Pax Syriana* imposed an almost unanimous discourse that echoed, to varying degrees, across the various Lebanese dailies and televisions. It was a pan-Arab discourse accentuating the “resistance” against the “enemies” of Lebanon and the Arabs—Israel, and the United States in general. The discourse particularly emphasized stories on the Iraq war, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Hezbollah’s operations against Israel in South Lebanon.

However, the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, precipitated by international furor over the assassination of Sunni leader and Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, caused further uncer-

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<sup>214</sup> Viscount Philippe de Tarrazi, *Tarikh Assahafah Al- Arabiya* (History of the Arab Press)(Dar Sader, 1967).

<sup>215</sup> Hannah Ziadeh, "In Defense of National Television: A Personal Account of Eclectic Lebanese Media Affinities," *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 15 (2005).

<sup>216</sup> See Mamoun Fandy, *Uncivil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007).



tainty in the Lebanese sociopolitical and media landscapes. While Lebanon restored a degree of its political sovereignty and media freedom, the inter-sectarian fears, which had been dormant during the 15-year Syrian hegemony over Lebanon, resurfaced, adding new dimensions to the abiding struggle over Lebanon's identity.

The assassination of Hariri divided the Lebanese people between those who accused Syria of the assassination and those who absolved Syria. It equally engendered an atmosphere of doubt, apprehension, and hostility among the various sects. This state of affairs was exacerbated by intervention in Lebanon by several foreign actors including the United States, France, and Saudi Arabia, who supported the anti-Syrian government headed by Hariri's son, Saad Hariri, which formed in the wake of the Beirut Spring. Syria and Iran, on the other hand, supported the opposition, led by Hezbollah.<sup>217</sup> Moreover, other events aggravated Lebanon's political scene: the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, the international tribunal over Hariri's assassination, the constant Sunni-Shiite clashes in various parts of Lebanon, and the current spillover from the Syrian war—all have raised questions about the viability of Lebanon's plural politics. Surveys conducted following Hariri's assassination showed that the various Lebanese communities distrusted each other, and that some of them would not hesitate to defend themselves with weapons.<sup>218</sup>

How are the media, now with their freedom relatively restored, reflecting the socio-political climate of the post-Syrian era? Do they present themselves as agents of integration, or

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<sup>217</sup> Robert Bechert, "Hariri's Assassination Triggers Crisis," *Social World*, November 3, 2005.

<sup>218</sup> Statistics conducted in 2008 revealed that 70 percent of Shiites said they trusted other Shiites while only 16 percent of them trusted Sunnis; 82 percent of Sunnis said they trusted other Sunnis, while only 31 percent trusted Shiites; 84 percent of the Druze trusted other Druze while only 29 percent trusted the Shiites and 56 percent the Sunnis; 57 percent of the Maronites trusted other Maronites while only 17 that they trusted Shiite, 13 percent Sunnis and 10 percent the Druze. See study by Mansoor Moadel, "Ethnicity and Values among the Lebanese Public: Findings from a Values Survey, 2008.) Another study by *Information International* revealed that 48.3 percent of a sample interviewed, which included all confessions mentioned owning military weapons, 40.6 percent of whom expressing willingness to use the weapons to defend themselves.

do they perpetuate the ambiguity and instability plaguing the Lebanese social and political systems? This and later chapters will attempt to provide answers to these queries.

### 3.1 Media Consociationalism

The consociational system that has governed Lebanon since the end of the civil war has paved the way for a media climate of a plural and consociational nature. A recommendation made through the Taef Agreement to reorganize all information media resulted in the adoption of the Audio-Visual Media Law, which was the legal mechanism that legitimized sectarian domination over the media. Each of the sects had a legally running television and radio station serving as its mouthpiece. This system seemed to keep a balance of power among the various communities, creating a form of media consociationalism.

The Audio-Visual Media Law (AVML) passed in 1994 and implemented in 1996 called for reorganization all the information media in Lebanon "under the canopy of the law and within the framework of responsible liberties that serve the cautious tendencies and the objective of ending the state of war."<sup>219</sup> Such regulation was needed in the aftermath of the civil war, when more than 150 radio stations and 40 television stations were operating without licenses.<sup>220</sup> The law, which, among other things, prohibits journalists from insulting the head of state, key government figures, or inciting sectarian strife, was "the first of its kind in the Arab world," because it revoked the monopoly of state television over broadcasting and legalized private broadcasting.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> The Taef Accords Document, Section 3 (G).

<sup>220</sup> Douglas Boyd, *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of Electronic Media in the Middle East* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University, 1999).

<sup>221</sup> Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Temple University Press, 2005), 124.

The outcome of the regulation, however, was not licensing based on professionalization, skill, or merit. It was rather meant to secure representation of the different confessional interests led by the country's most powerful political and sectarian leaders. The private stations that first received licenses were Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI), representing the Maronite Christians; Future TV, representing the Sunni Muslims, NBN, representing pro-Amal Shiite Muslims,<sup>222</sup> and Murr TV (MTV), representing the Greek Orthodox Christians. Stations that followed in receiving licenses were Al-Manar (The Beacon), representing the pro-Hezbollah Shiites; Al-Jadeed (New TV), a pan-Arab network; and more recently, Orange TV (OTV), representing another group of the Maronite Christians. While all these stations received local and "foreign" funding, Tele-Liban (TL), the only government-owned station, lacks substantive funding and has been declining since the end of the civil war. Politicians and businessmen were more interested in investing in private stations than in helping Tele-Liban develop into a powerful national outlet representative of all. The station today suffers from lack of equipment and insufficient staffing. While Tele-Liban is the only non-partisan station in Lebanon, it does not draw large audiences.<sup>223</sup> In the words of NBN journalist Yacoub Alawiya, "State media do not reflect any political line and are very weak."<sup>224</sup> The distribution of media licenses across the sectarian, socio-political spectrum reflects the plural nature of the society, where groups' allegiance is to their communities and not to the state; where, as Rabushka and Shepsle maintain

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<sup>222</sup> Amal is the movement founded by Shiite Imam Mussa Assadr in 1974. It was originally referred to as the "Movement of the Dispossessed." The party is headed by the Shiite speaker of parliament, Nabih Berri and has a large representation in parliament. The party is allied to Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement headed by Maronite leader and Member of Parliament Michel Aoun.

<sup>223</sup> Jad Melki, Yasmine Dabbous, Khald Nasser, and Sarah Mallat, "Mapping Digital Media: Lebanon," *Open Society Foundation*, (May 2012): 32.

<sup>224</sup> "IREX Media Sustainability Index: Lebanon: 2010-211," 9.

"communal loyalties contend for ultimate political authority and loyalty."<sup>225</sup> This explains to some degree why—among other things— Tele-Liban rates the lowest in viewership.<sup>226</sup>

The AVML has been often applied selectively and unpredictably to further the interests of the politicians in power. Its ten-member regulatory body, the National Audiovisual Council (NAVC) tasked with allocating licenses has no executive authority; decisions to grant or revoke licenses lie primarily within the Council of Ministers. This has led to the circumvention of the law in some cases and its strict implementation for political ends in others. For example, the law prohibits an individual or family from owning more than 10 percent in a television company in order to "prevent political parties from having TV networks."<sup>227</sup> In practice, however, it is not the case. Nabil Dajani describes it as "congruent with the special socio-political structure of the Lebanese society."<sup>228</sup> Most private stations are directly or indirectly owned by politicians who are also sectarian leaders. MTV (Murr TV) is owned by Gabriel El-Murr; an influential Greek Orthodox politician; NBN, owned by Nabih Berri, the speaker of parliament and leader of the pro-Amal Shiites; Future TV, owned by the Hariri family, whose father and son are influential Sunni leaders and were both prime ministers; LBCI, formerly owned by the Lebanese Forces, leaders of a large Maronite following; Orange TV, owned by Aoun and his movement, who represent another Maronite following; Al-Manar, owned by Hezbollah, the Shiite party; and Al-Jadeed (New TV) owned by an independent Sunni businessman (previously by the Communist party), making it relatively more independent, albeit politicized.<sup>229</sup> The majority of shareholders in these networks are from the same religious group—a practice also prohibited by the law. For

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<sup>225</sup> Alvin Rabushka, and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability* (Columbus: Ohio, 1972), 13.

<sup>226</sup> "IREX 2010-211," 8.

<sup>227</sup> "IREX Media Sustainability Index: Lebanon, 2009," 73.

<sup>228</sup> Nabil Dajani, "The Changing Scene of Lebanese Television," *TBS Archives* 7, 2001.

<sup>229</sup> "IREX 2010-2011."

example, Orthodox Christians have owned more than 70 percent of MTV's corporate shares; Maronites have owned 55 percent of LBCI's shares; almost half of NBN shareholders have been Shiite Muslims; Sunni Muslims have owned 59 percent of future TV's shares, and Hariri family members and relatives have owned more than 43 percent of the station's shares.<sup>230</sup>

However, stations have not always been transparent on the question of ownership. Media ownership, as Lebanese media expert Magda Abu Fadil maintains, is "a contentious issue in Lebanon because full disclosure of who really has how many shares in any given organization, and what foreign interests are involved, are hard to trace under the current legal regime."<sup>231</sup> Since these stations are, above all, commercial enterprises, they rely on advertising for funding. But, given the low figures of advertisement money spent on television networks,<sup>232</sup> critics suspect that stations rely on other means for funding. This is referred to as "invisible money" or "political money," a practice that also existed before and during the civil war, where money is generated both locally and from foreign sources. Countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Syria, Egypt, the PLO, Libya, Iran, European countries and the United States, are all believed to have provided Lebanese media with money.<sup>233</sup> According to a report compiled by Lebanese and other media professionals and academics, "Media executives from various sectors meet with government officials from the contributing country and promise in return for a given sum of money to refrain from criticizing the donor in question."<sup>234</sup> Despite the fact that no evidence exists to support these claims, this practice is "common knowledge among media professionals and critics."<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Jad Melki, "Television and the State in Lebanon," *Dissertation*. University of Maryland, Baltimore, MD, 2008.

<sup>231</sup> Magda Abu Fadil, "Lebanese Media Far from Being Accountable," *The Huffington Post*, February 4, 2013.

<sup>232</sup> Figures from Arab-Ad magazine show that advertising expenditures in Lebanon in 2012 totaled \$182m out of which \$71m was spent on television or 39 percent of advertisement expenditures.

<sup>233</sup> "Mapping Digital Media: Lebanon," 79.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

The use of the AVML for political ends has not been uncommon. A famous case is the 2002 shutdown of Murr TV (MTV). MTV was among the first stations to receive a license, but it was forcefully closed after its owner, Gabriel El- Murr, was accused of using the channel to promote his campaign for the June 2002 parliamentary elections—an act prohibited by the AVML. El- Murr had run for the elections and won against a member of his family who was supported by Emile Lahoud, the pro-Syrian president at that time. As El- Murr was a fierce critic of Syria, and as Syria was off limits to media discussion, MTV had to be closed. It reopened in 2009, four years after Syria withdrew from Lebanon.

On another famous case in 2003, the government cut the satellite link of Al-Jadeed (New TV). The station, owned by Tahseen Khayat, an ally of Qatar and a rival to Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, had planned to show a controversial episode on the program "Bila Raqib" (Without Surveillance), in which Saudi opposition figures were invited to discuss sensitive issues that had to do with the Saudi government, Hariri's ally and close friend. Because the program was to be broadcast on satellite, Hariri feared the show might damage relations with Saudi Arabia, who had warned against airing the show and threatened to cut aid to Lebanon. Hariri took the action that cut New TV's satellite link. However, the channel was reconnected by an order from President Emile Lahoud, who saw New TV as a means to attack Hariri, his rival.<sup>236</sup> The New TV case also illustrates the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. As Fandy contends, "The accusations and counter-accusations between Future TV and New TV before the assassination of Hariri replicated the Saudi-Qatari animosity, with a Lebanese tinge."<sup>237</sup>

Politics also played a role in securing a license for NBN even before the network existed—a move that guaranteed that the Shiite speaker of parliament had a media platform. Al-

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<sup>236</sup> "Tensions Mount after President Snubs Premier over NTV," *The Daily Star*, July 1, 2003.

<sup>237</sup> Fandy, 1279.

Jadeed, (New TV) on the other hand, which had already been established when the law was implemented, was at first denied a license on grounds that its application was not in order. It got its license in 2000.<sup>238</sup> While Al-Manar was first refused a license, its critics believe that the late Syrian president Hafez Al-Assad intervened and convinced the Lebanese government that the station was needed for Lebanon's war against Israel.<sup>239</sup>

The Audio Visual Media Law was the mechanism that not only legitimized sectarian monopoly of the media but also constituted a playground for politicians competing for power. As Naomi Sakr contends, "Laws with vaguely worded prohibitions relating to notions of security, national unity, and reputation can be applied according to the personal interpretation of the people in power, whenever they are inconvenienced by media reporting."<sup>240</sup>

### **3.2 The Pro-Syrian, Anti Syrian Divide and Lebanese Media Polarization**

The period following the assassination of Hariri opened a new era for the Lebanese media. After 15 years of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon, the Lebanese media regained a degree of sovereignty and freedom to be an effective agent of national and social integration much needed after years of civil war and Syrian guardianship. In the first days following the assassination, the media seemingly played a role in the construction of national unity. According to Ali Hamade, a political show host on Future TV and editorialist in *Annahar* (The Day), television [during the Beirut Spring] "played the major role in mobilizing people and getting them onto the street. It led the politics."<sup>241</sup> Lina Khatib maintains that television during that period was instrumental in emphasizing a national togetherness that seemed to be felt among the Lebanese despite their various

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<sup>238</sup> [http://www.elections-lebanon.org/elections/docs\\_6\\_G\\_4\\_4a\\_25.aspx](http://www.elections-lebanon.org/elections/docs_6_G_4_4a_25.aspx)

<sup>239</sup> Avi Jorsih, "Al-Manar: Hizbullah TV, 24/7" *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2004, p. 17-31.

<sup>240</sup> Naomi Sakr, *Arab Television Today* (New York, NY: I.B Tauris & Co.Ltd, 2007), 43.

<sup>241</sup> Ali Jaafar, "Crossing the Great Divide," *Daily Variety*, May 2, 2005.

sects. While she cautions against overestimating the role of television in the process of democratic transformation, Khatib argues that Lebanese television, at least for a short-lived period of time, was able to create a sense of national unity that had not been felt since the end of the civil war. This took place, as she explains, through an emphasis on religious togetherness by showing people of different religions holding their religious symbols and converging on Hariri's gravesite for prayer. Television also emphasized images of the Lebanese flags that dominated the scene in downtown Beirut as opposed to previous years when the Lebanese had no sense of belonging to their nation. As she puts it, "The Lebanese flag was resurrected during the Beirut Spring as a symbol of the pre-war nation. It finally gained acceptance as a sign of national unity, its presence symbolizing the need for the Lebanese to come together at a time of national crisis. Television camera crews clearly contributed to this as they picked up on the imagery in covering the events."<sup>242</sup>

The national togetherness was short-lived. The Beirut Spring, with all the hopes it raised for the Lebanese people, was like a mirage that seemed within reach, but in reality, was far away. The events which unfolded after Hariri's assassination proved once again that sectarianism was deeply embedded in the Lebanese psyche and the media were soon to expose it and amplify it. The televisions of the post-Hariri period (2005-present) have been divided into two fiercely opposed camps reflecting the divisions between the political and sectarian leaders: an anti-Syrian, pro-March 14 camp, grouping LBCI, MTV, and Future TV; and a pro-Syrian, pro-March 8 camp, grouping Al-Manar, NBN, OTV, and Al-Jadeed (New TV). Since Hariri's assassination, they have been used as platforms of provocative sectarian discourse. Pro-Syrian, March 8 media outlets promoted Hezbollah and Syria and accused their opponents of "treason" and of serving

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<sup>242</sup> Lina Khatib, "Television and Public Action in the Beirut Spring," in *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy, and Public Life*, ed. Naomi Sakr (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), 7.



American and Israeli interests. Anti-Syrian, pro-March 14 outlets, on the other hand, accused their opponents of serving the interests of Syria and Iran.<sup>243</sup> Almost all media relied on sectarian inflammatory language and mobilization techniques, such as video clips, ads, hate speeches by leaders, heated debate shows, and heavily editorialized news bulletins.

**Table 2. Media Channels and Political Affiliation**

<b>March 8/Pro-Syrian</b>	<b>March 14/Anti-Syrian</b>
Orange TV	LBCI
Al-Manar	Future TV
NBN	MTV
Al-Jadeed (New TV)	

The post-Rafik Hariri period did not only witness an increase in the number of political programs; people who wanted to get an objective opinion, as one former head of programming at Future TV mentioned, had to watch more than one bulletin a day "because you can't get the full picture from just one channel. They each show their own perspective."<sup>244</sup> However, journalists agree that people tend to get the news from within the borders of their political and sectarian media. Commenting on viewership, *Al-Balad* daily journalist Ali Dahe said that "The Shiites mostly watch Al-Manar or NBN, while the Sunnis watch Future TV."<sup>245</sup> In fact, according to Sami Hamad of the Lebanese Media Information Services, Lebanese people do not get to hear all points of view, as Al-Manar, for example, is not broadcast in the predominantly Sunni North,

<sup>243</sup> IREX 2010-2011, 9.

<sup>244</sup> Ali Jaafar, "Political Crisis," *Daily Variety*, December 2005.

<sup>245</sup> "IREX 2010-211," 8.

while Future TV is not available in the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut.<sup>246</sup>

Sometimes journalists cannot even have access to news due to restrictions resulting from the political leaning of the media outlet they work for. While Al-Manar reporters, for example, have exclusive access to Hezbollah-controlled Shiite areas, they do not usually report from the Beirut Sunni-dominated neighborhood of Tareek Al-Jadeedeh, where clashes between Sunnis and Shiites often occur.<sup>247</sup>

The involvement of the media in political and sectarian feuds has sometimes culminated in inflammatory and precarious situations. When pro-government Sunni parliament member Walid Eido was killed in a car bomb as part of a series of assassinations aimed at anti-Syrian officials,<sup>248</sup> NBN's coverage of the event revealed the station's extreme association with the pro-Syrian, March 8 camp. The presenter, whose microphone was mistakenly kept on live while she was not on the screen, was heard saying: "What took them so long?" speculating with a colleague which politician might be killed next so that the Mach 8 alliance would be able to control the government.<sup>249</sup>

Other sectarian incidents turned violent. Clashes between Sunnis and Shiites in Beirut in May 2008 triggered attacks by Hezbollah militants on the Hariri-owned media. Accusing the Hariri media of "stoking the flames of sectarianism and discord," Hezbollah unplugged Future TV, Future News (then) and Radio Orient (Hariri's radio station) and set the building of their newspaper *Al-Mustaqbal* on fire.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>247</sup> "IREX 2009," 76.

<sup>248</sup> Since Hariri's assassination, a significant number of assassinations of anti-Syrian Christian and Muslims politicians took place, the latest being in December 2012 of pro-Hariri Brigadier general Wissan el-Hassan. See "Timeline of Explosions and Targeted Assassinations from 2004 to 2012," *The Daily Star*, October 20, 2012.

<sup>249</sup> Stephen Metcalf, *BBC Monitoring Research*, July 25, 2007.

<sup>250</sup> Magda Abu Fadil, "Future Media Unplugged by Hezbollah Backers," *The Huffington Post*, May 12, 2008.

Besides using inflammatory discourse, television stations have diverged considerably in their reporting of important stories. Pro-and anti-Syrian media, for example, were selective in their coverage of two important events that happened on the same day: the third-year commemoration of Hariri's killing and the assassination of a top Hezbollah commander. Pro-march 8 stations, including Al-Manar, NBN, and Al-Jadeed focused on the killing of the Hezbollah commander, holding Israel responsible for the crime. They almost ignored or even criticized Hariri's commemoration event in downtown Beirut, where anti-Syrian, March 14 supporters, rallied. Using the right camera angles, they reported low turnouts as a sign that the March 14 group was losing popular support. Pro-March 14 media, on the other hand, emphasized the commemoration event and criticized the speech which the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, made at the funeral of the slain commander.<sup>251</sup> Unlike their pro-Syrian counterparts, Future TV and LBC reported a turnout of up to one and a half million people at the Hariri commemoration. The divisions in the media climate reflected political and sectarian divisions in the country. LBCI's reportage was descriptive of the Lebanese condition:

More than half of Lebanon was on the streets, but the tragedy is that Lebanon is in fact two squares, two souls, two speeches and two projects. Both sides' escalation in rhetoric seems to be a reflection of the escalation in the international and regional confrontation.

Lebanon seems to face a dangerous division that warns of a new form of confrontation.<sup>252</sup>

Divergence in reporting was also clear in the prejudiced media coverage of the heated 2009 parliamentary elections. A report by the European Union's Elections Observation Mission revealed that the stations' coverage of the elections matched their political and sectarian affiliations. According to an electoral law implemented for the first time in 2009, all media were required to of-

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<sup>251</sup>"Lebanese Media Carry Diverse Reporting on 14 February Rallies," *BBC Monitoring Middle East – Political*, February 15, 2008.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

fer all candidates equal airtime and print space and were prohibited from supporting any one candidate.<sup>253</sup> However, the media did not respect the law. Al-Manar, OTV, and NBN gave more coverage of the March 8 group, "with Al-Manar and OTV commenting negatively on the March 14."<sup>254</sup> Al-Manar and OTV devoted 68 and 66 percent of news coverage respectively to the March 8 group, and 23 percent to the March 14. This was followed by NBN, which gave 62 percent to the March 8 and 26 percent to the March 14. Al-Jadeed gave almost equal coverage to both blocs but was critical of the March 14. This contrasts with the coverage by the pro-March 14 stations, with Future TV devoting 66 percent of news coverage to March 14 politicians, while only 22 percent to opposition parties. MTV and LBCI gave 57 and 52 percent to March 14 and 30 and 33 percent to opposition parties, respectively.<sup>255</sup> One Future TV producer complained that his station had first adhered to the directive of the Interior Ministry and was giving politicians of different affiliations equal airspace. However, when they (his station) saw that other stations did not respect the law, Future TV "went ahead and campaigned—[because they] were dragged into this."<sup>256</sup>

All television stations broadcast political talk shows with guests of different political and sectarian affiliations invited to discuss current events. Debates covering sensitive topics—Syria specifically—often result in quarrels and even assaults. In November 2011, MTV's program "Bimawdu'eeyah" (Objectively) became a hit after a heated debate turned violent between Mustapha Alloush, of the Hariri Future Movement, and the pro-Syrian, Fayez Shukr, of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, who argued about Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad. The debate intensified when Alloush called the Syrian president "a liar, a tyrant, and a criminal." Defending As-

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<sup>253</sup> "IREX 2009," 73.

<sup>254</sup> "EU Election Observation Mission Lebanon-Final Report," June 7, 2009.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> "IREX 2009," 74.

sad, Shukr hurled obscenities at Alloush and insulted his mother. In the escalation of curses, Shukr threw his glass of water across the table, picked up his chair, ready to throw it at his opponent. He had to be restrained from beating Alloush.<sup>257</sup> In another incident in February 2013, a talk show on Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV almost turned to violence when guests were discussing the escalation of the war in Syria. Salem Zahrani, who heads a Lebanese media center and who supports Assad, flung two glasses of water at Assaad Bechara, who disapproved of the policy of the Syrian regime. The host intervened to stop the fight.<sup>258</sup>

The Lebanese media, despite their opposing political agendas, tend to agree—or appear to agree—over the hatred of Israel as the common enemy. For example, all outlets, pro-and anti-Syrian, provided extensive coverage of the July 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, emphasizing the material and human destruction caused by the Israeli aggression. In January 2013, an anti-Israeli Lebanese militant made the headlines in Lebanese media when a French court revoked an earlier decision to release him after 28 years in a French prison. The Leftist militant, George Abdallah, was accused of killing an American Lieutenant and an Israeli diplomat in Paris.<sup>259</sup> However, the court postponed its decision to release him to a further date pending the deportation order from the French Interior Ministry. The delay caused uproar and demonstrations in Beirut, with accusations that the French decision was affected by American and Israeli interference.<sup>260</sup> While Al-Manar and Al-Jadeed were the stations that most staunchly covered the story, other media provided extensive coverage. Some of them, including LBCI, led with the story on their prime-time evening news bulletin.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> MTV Episode *Bimawdu'eeyah* (Objectively), November 15, 2011.

<sup>258</sup> Al-Manar Episode, February 9, 2013.

<sup>259</sup> "Abdallah Released on Condition He Leaves France," *The Daily Star*, January 10, 2013.

<sup>260</sup> "Paoli Says Protests over Abdallah Deportation Delay 'Not Justified,'" *Naharnet*, January 15, 2013.

<sup>261</sup> See DNA episodes at: <http://beta1.futuretvnetwork.com/node/1347>

### 3.3 A Closer Look at Four Television Networks

In this section, four private television stations whose discourse is analyzed in the next chapter are discussed. These stations— OTV, Future TV, Al-Manar, and LBCI— provide a panoramic view of the general media climate in Lebanon. They represent the main Lebanese sects— the Maronites, Shiites, and Sunnis, and they may be categorized as polar types: on one pole, OTV and Al-Manar represent pro-Syrian, March 8 discourse; and on another pole, LBCI and Future TV represent the anti-Syrian, Mach 14 discourse (while Future TV is fiercely anti-March 8, LBCI has not been so all the way).

#### 3.3.1 *Orange TV*

Since it was established in 2007, Orange TV (OTV) has served as the platform which Maronite leader Michel Aoun has used to promote his agenda. Located in the Christian area of Sin el-Fil, OTV takes its name after the orange color logo of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement.<sup>262</sup> The network was launched when Aoun saw an urgent need for "unbiased" news.<sup>263</sup> Aoun has repeatedly attacked other Lebanese channels, including LBCI and Future TV, accusing them of biased and unprofessional reporting when covering news about him and his allies.<sup>264</sup> Carrying the logo "For the People, By the People," the network claims to promote "modernism, freedom, and democracy" and "address the challenges facing the nation through objective analysis and effective solutions."<sup>265</sup> Its news and political programming director said OTV has only one competitor; "the truth."<sup>266</sup> Aoun, who was interviewed after the opening of the channel, said "there

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<sup>262</sup> The Free Patriotic Movement was founded by Aoun in 2003. It has a nationalist, reformist ideology. The movement is affiliated with Aoun's Reform and Change bloc in parliament and has 18 out of 128 seats, making it the largest Christian party in parliament.

<sup>263</sup> "About Us:" OTV website, <http://otv.com.lb/page.php?id=3>

<sup>264</sup> See "Aoun Attacking Media," [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ds\\_6ZkQ9FAE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ds_6ZkQ9FAE).

<sup>265</sup> See OTV Website, <http://otv.com.lb>

<sup>266</sup> Steve Metcalf, "Analysis: New Lebanese Channel, OTV Says it Will Aim for Objectivity," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, July 25, 2007.

would be no interference in news or political programming," and that he would not "beg" for money from any country to avoid owing any allegiance,<sup>267</sup> an allusion to OTV's rival, Future TV, believed to be financed, among others, by Saudi money.<sup>268</sup>

Despite its claims for objectivity, OTV has bluntly promoted Aoun's politics and those of his protectors and allies in the March 8 camp. It has particularly supported the pro-Syrian, March 8 alliance, with Hezbollah at its head, and adopted a particularly anti-Sunni rhetoric. This rhetoric is manifested through constant attacks on Hariri and through reports insinuating that there is a constant danger of Sunni extremism in Lebanon and the region. In the words of Michael Young, "Aoun [when he's cornered] resorts to attacks against Sunni prerogatives to rally the Christians."<sup>269</sup> In fact, Aoun's political agenda, which had previously promoted a national discourse, has since 2006 shifted in favor of a pro-Christian discourse justified by the argument of the *Ihbat* (frustration) of the Christians; that the Christians are marginalized (by the Sunnis in Aoun's perspective) and misrepresented (through the adoption of electoral laws that have promoted the interests of the Sunnis at the expense of the Christians). A Sunni state minister recently accused Aoun of "constantly provoking the Sunni sect" and causing sectarian agitation.<sup>270</sup> Dar el Fatwa, Lebanon's highest Sunni authority, demanded an apology from Aoun for "offending Muslims" after he and his TV station claimed that alcohol was found in the car of a slain Sunni cleric.<sup>271</sup> Aoun's Christian rival, Samir Geagea, accused him of waging a "battle of ethnic cleansing

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Although other stations are funded by foreign powers, Aoun particularly implies Future TV because he has repeatedly accused Hariri and other Sunnis of being Saudi agents.

<sup>269</sup> Michael Young, "No Method to Aoun's Destructives," *The Daily Star*, June 19, 2008.

<sup>270</sup> "Karami Retaliates to Aoun's Attacks on Sunni Figures," *The Daily Star*, November 26, 2011. The reply to Aoun was made by Ahmad Karami after Aoun and his bloc boycotted a cabinet session meeting in opposition to the prime minister's backing of an international tribunal that would try the perpetrators of Hariri's assassination.

<sup>271</sup> "Lebanon's Highest Sunni Authority Demands Aoun's Apology," *The Daily Star*, July 19, 2012.

against Sunnis through portraying them as extremists.”<sup>272</sup> In following the same approach, OTV has repeatedly presented a negative view of Sunnis. One example is its report on the death of a Lebanese priest who passed in a blaze at his archdiocese allegedly from a fire caused by electrical problems. The report claimed that the death was possibly "the continuation of a string of fundamentalist attacks on churches witnessed recently in other countries," a fact which caused the interior minister to warn OTV against "irresponsible media behavior" aimed at scaremongering.<sup>273</sup> The anti-Sunni rhetoric is even embedded in non-political reports. For example, when OTV broadcast an around-the world report at the end of one of its bulletin before the New Year, it made sure to include a story on Sunni extremism:

Celebrating New Year's Eve is prohibited to Muslims. This is one of the new fundamentalist Islamic Fatwas in Kyrgyzstan. In this state situated in the middle of Asia, a number of Sunni clerics prohibited Muslims from participating in New Year celebrations as they considered this celebration to be costly and having no connection with Islam in any way.<sup>274</sup>

While none of the other television stations reported this story that day in light of its insignificance to Lebanon, it fell within the parameter of OTV's anti-Sunni campaign.

Echoing the voice of its leader, OTV has launched a staunchly Christian ethnocentric campaign by promoting a new electoral law proposal ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2013. Aggressively defended by Aoun and other Christian groups, the law, if passed, would enable members of parliament to be elected exclusively by voters from their own sect. This will give the chance for Christians, who, on the whole, have complained of misrepresenta-

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<sup>272</sup> "Geagea Urges Arrest of Takfiri Network Head: Aoun Waging War of Ethnic Cleansing Against Sunnis," *Naharnet*, March 15, 2012.

<sup>273</sup> "Mitri Warns Against Irresponsible Media Coverage," *The Daily Star*, November 6, 2010.

<sup>274</sup> OTV, December 26, 2012.



tion, to elect the Christian MPs of their choice. The law has divided public opinion with the Sunnis, Druze, and independent Christians particularly rejecting it on grounds that it would exacerbate sectarianism and lead to further national disintegration.<sup>275</sup> Aoun, however, has repeatedly claimed that the Christians of Lebanon have been marginalized and their MPs elected to office through Muslim votes.<sup>276</sup> In promotion of the law, OTV showed a video of two minutes and four seconds titled "Fair Representation is a Right; Don't Miss it,"<sup>277</sup> which shows citizens standing before a camera, revealing their religion and sect and the region they are from. They call for a new law that would make their voice heard and that represents them: "I am Jennifer, a Maronite from Kahhaleh, Aley; I am Roman Catholic from Baalbeck, Hermel; I am Roman Orthodox from Rashaya; I am Ralf, an Evangelist, from Kfour, Nabatieh; I used to vote out of obligation; I will not vote as long as the law does not represent me, [etc.]"

Despite being a propaganda tool of Aoun politics, OTV, like all other private stations, is a profit-driven business. The station offers a variety of entertainment, educational, and social programs that cater to various tastes. The station has a number of political shows, including "Bila Hasaneh" (Without Impunity), "Hiwar Al- Yawm" (Talk of the day), and "Bayna Assoutour" (Between the Lines), whose hosts invite politicians to discuss news on Lebanon and the region. The station equally broadcasts a news bulletin in the Armenian language for the Lebanese Armenian minority, some of whose leaders are allied with Aoun's bloc in parliament.

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<sup>275</sup> While the Sunnis and the Druze have voiced concern that the law will exacerbate sectarianism, their concern is that their bloc in parliament would shrink and Hezbollah's power would be boosted if such a law were passed.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with Michel Aoun, "Bila Hasaneh, OTV (In Arabic) January 15, 2013.

<sup>277</sup> Video Available from: <http://otv.com.lb/episodes.php?id=15&eid=2067>

### 3.3.2 *Al-Manar TV*

Al-Manar TV stands out as a highly ethnocentric Shiite station with a pan-Arab and Islamic discourse. From its inception in 1991 (it became a satellite channel in 2000), it has belonged to Hezbollah both politically and culturally.<sup>278</sup>

Located in a Shiite and Hezbollah dominated neighborhood of a southern Beirut suburb, Al-Manar proudly calls itself "the station of the Arabs and the Muslims."<sup>279</sup> It describes its programs as stemming from its Arab and Islamic culture and milieu and from its Arab and Islamic values. The station's priorities are "the rightful causes of our Umma," of which the Palestinian cause, the "Zionist occupation" of south Lebanon, and the "pulse of the Iraqi street that is resistant to American occupation," are central.<sup>280</sup> Shareholders in Al-Manar are all supportive of its policy, and its high ranking executives are usually important figures in the party of Hezbollah.<sup>281</sup>

Al-Manar's content is highly anti-Semitic. It is Hezbollah's tool in launching its "psychological warfare against the Israeli enemy"<sup>282</sup> and mobilizing Arabs and Muslims against Israel and what it calls American hegemony and Western imperialism. Al-Manar's approach succeeded in winning Arab audiences with a report showing that the station rated number 10 among the stations watched most during the 2006 July war between Hezbollah and Israel.<sup>283</sup> Al-Manar's media have antagonized several countries, and many have banned its transmission from their airwaves. America has called the network "a mouthpiece of hatred and violence, "promoting suicide attacks against U.S troops."<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Fandy, *Uncivil War of Words: Media and Politics in the Arab World*, 73.

<sup>279</sup> Al-Manar Website: "About us."

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> "Hezbollah Inaugurates Satellite Channel via Arabsat," *Al-Ray*, May 29, 2009.

<sup>283</sup> Amir Mizroch, "Hizbullah's Al-Manar Soars into Ratings' Top 10," *The Jerusalem Post*, Friday, August 25, 2006.

<sup>284</sup> William Triplett, "Polls want B'caster on Global Watch List," *Daily Variety*, Thursday, August 4, 2005.

Al-Manar's programming is mostly propagandistic and reliant on one dominant media frame: resistance against oppression. Whether it is oppression from "imperialist" powers or from local rivals, the discourse of oppression is associated with the Shiite sect and deeply embedded in their culture and their past. Thus, reports showing Israeli aggression against Palestinians, American attacks in Iraq, or commemoration of the battle of Karbala, where the Shiites mourn the killing of their Imams, are emphasized.<sup>285</sup>

While Al-Manar's programming includes social and entertainment programs, the station stands out as having a large number of religious programs. There are at least 17 different religious programs that are distributed through the whole week. To mention a few, "Thalika Al-Kitab" (That Book), "Fiqh Al-Hayat" (Jurisprudence of Life), "Khitab Al-Qaed," (Discourse of the Leader) "Ana W'al-Hussein" (The Hussein and I), "Nafahat Qur'aniyah" (Qur'anic inspirations,) are all programs that deal with interpreting and applying the Holy Quran to daily life and featuring speeches by Shiite clerics that are meant to teach Muslims how to live righteously, etc.<sup>286</sup>

As a propaganda media organization, Al-Manar features numerous political programs. The network presently airs at least 10 political programs, (this figure excludes the high number of political documentaries). These may be talk-shows, live or taped speeches by the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, or other Shiite politicians and clerics. Popular programs include "Hadith Assa'a," (Talk of the Hour), "Matha Ba'd" (What's Next), and "Bayna Qawsayn" (Between Brackets), which all address local and regional political issues that are of concern to Leba-

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<sup>285</sup> The battle of Karbala took place in 680 A.D. in Karbala, Iraq, where Prophet Mohammed's grandson, Hussein, and his supporters fought the army of Yazid bin Muawiya. Hussein and his followers were killed, and this tragedy is central in Shiite history and public memory.

<sup>286</sup> Al-Manar TV, 2011.

non.<sup>287</sup> What is common about these shows is that they often feature guests who espouse a strong anti-Jewish and anti-American rhetoric. Other programs are sociopolitical. For example, “The Victorious: History of the Resistance in Lebanon,” is an Al-Manar production that tells the story of the “heroic acts” of resistance fighters against Israeli occupation of Lebanon and the lives of the inhabitants of the south who suffered that occupation.

Al-Manar produces several programs that focus on the resistance. These constitute an important component of its psychological war. For example, “Our martyrs, Hallmark of History” is a daily show that commemorates Hezbollah militants who die while fighting the Israeli “enemy.” It shows militants reading their will before going to battle. Much of what is read by the militants before their death reveals Hezbollah’s ideology and mission. For example, one of the militants, reading his will, reveals clearly the organic relationship between Hezbollah and Iran:

My brothers, I sincerely ask Allah to prolong the life of Imam Khomeini, the leader, reviver, and honor of the Islamic nation, the motive to the Muslims, and the guarantee to the continuity of the nation until the appearance of Imam Mahdi who will spread justice in the world after it was filled with injustice and oppression.<sup>288</sup>

With modern and highly-equipped studios, Al-Manar is believed to receive indirect financial support from Iran. According to Avi Jorish, “Iran provides an estimated \$100-200 million per year to Hezbollah, which in turn transfers money to Al-Manar, making Iranian funding of the station indirect.”<sup>289</sup> Jorish maintains that this indirect form of funding “was confirmed by former Al-Manar program director Sheikh Nasir Al-Akhdar, who asserted that Al-Manar receives a

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Information about this program is available from:  
<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=1&cid=46&frid=46&eid=46529>.

<sup>289</sup> Avi Jorish, *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hezbollah's Al-Manar Television*, 32

large portion of its budget through subsidies offered by Hezbollah."<sup>290</sup> Al-Manar also receives funding from Muslim communities in Europe, Canada, and the United States. The channel solicits its donations under "The Intifada in the Occupied Palestine Name," "The Palestinian Uprising," and "The Resistance Information Donation Fund."<sup>291</sup>

Al-Manar's biased reportage towards the March 8 camp and the Alawite Syrian regime clearly reflects Hezbollah's strategic alliance with Syria and Iran. The 2011 Media Sustainability Index Report on Lebanon states that Al-Manar has "dropped any pretense towards objective reporting of the killing of protesters in Syria by its allies in the Assad regime, repeating the regime's mantra that the Syrian uprising was driven by Salafists or Sunni fundamentalists."<sup>292</sup>

### 3.3.3 *Future TV*

Established by the Hariri family in 1993 and located in a Sunni dominated area of West Beirut, Future TV has been considered a Sunni counterweight to the Maronite-dominated LBCI.<sup>293</sup> Due to Hariri's closeness to the Saudi royal family, it is assumed that much of his business and political money has come from the Saudi kingdom. Recent reports on rival LBCI claimed Hariri's son, Saad Hariri, received \$4 billion from Saudi Arabia and Qatar to support his companies, including Future TV. Hariri, however, denied the reports.<sup>294</sup>

During the Syrian hegemony in Lebanon, Future TV, like other channels, obeyed Syrian orders. As Maamoun Fandy puts it, "Hariri's closeness to Syria could explain Future TV's self-censorship and deference to Damascus."<sup>295</sup> Its programming was pan-Arab, highlighting the Palestinian struggle, Hezbollah's role liberating the south of Lebanon, the American war on Iraq,

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> "Iran Expands International Media Outfit, Backs Hezbollah News," *Jerusalem Post*, October 11, 2011.

<sup>292</sup> "IREX, 2011,"

<sup>293</sup> See Fandy, *Uncivil War of Words*.

<sup>294</sup> "Hariri Slams LBCI over Report he Received Financial Aid from Saudi Arabia, Qatar," *Naharnet*, August 23, 2012.

<sup>295</sup> See Fandy, *Uncivil War of Words*.

and was defensive of the role of Syria in Lebanon. The turning point in Future TV's discourse was the killing of Hariri, which the Sunnis blamed on Syria. However, it was not only the killing of Hariri as a leader and influential figure in the region that caused the shift. The killing was considered an attack against the Sunnis of Lebanon by a Shiite Alawite regime. For the first time, the Sunnis, who had persistently spoken in the name of their Arabness, their inseparable identity from Syria, shifted to adopting a pan-Lebanese discourse. As Hariri was not the first Sunni leader to be allegedly assassinated at the hands of the Syrian regime, the Sunnis felt persecuted. Some argue that Sunnis were "harassed and assassinated because the Alawite regime in Syria feels threatened by powerful Sunnis and their potential effect on Syria's own Sunnis."<sup>296</sup> The result was an open accusation by the network of the Syrian regime of killing Hariri and a propaganda campaign against Syria and its Lebanese allies which started in 2005 and continues to this very day.

More recently, the station openly took the side of the Sunni Free Syrian Army in its war with the Al-Assad regime. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, Future TV has reported daily on the news, not only on its regular news broadcasts, but also on a daily program dedicated to the Syrian conflict. Under the headline of "Syria: The Beginning of the End, 2013," Future TV has emphasized the atrocities that the Syrian regime was allegedly committing against its people and showed how the Free Syrian army was scoring victories signaling the end of the Assad regime. In one of its reports, Future TV told the following story:

The tighter the grip on the Assad regime, the more brutal it becomes. Video footage leaked from the cell phone of one of the Assad "braggers" reveals hostages brutally treat-

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<sup>296</sup> "Lebanon's clumsy Angry Sunnis: One of Lebanon's Largest Sects is Becoming Its Own Worst Enemy," *Beirutspring.com*, May 20, 2012.

ed at the hands of the Assad regime. [The report runs against footage showing Al-Assad troops allegedly beating and kicking the hostages on their heads amid blood]<sup>297</sup>

Another report described Al-Assad in derogatory terms, highlighting a massacre Al-Assad allegedly committed against people saying prayers:

Every day of the Syrian revolution, Bashar Al-Assad adds hundreds of dead and wounded souls to his account. His brigades committed another appalling massacre when his planes shelled the Hirak region in Daraa, which led to the killing and wounding of tens of people who were exiting the Big Mosque after saying their prayers.<sup>298</sup>

Besides its position on Syria, Future TV has directed a fierce news campaign against Aoun and his media outlet. This was manifested through sarcastic reports and interviews with politicians, lawyers, and civil society activists who spoke against the electoral law Aoun was propagating. All interviews conducted emphasized that the law will lead to "fragmentation of the Lebanese entity to conflicting sects and confessions... this is the law of the assassination of moderation... the law of the rise of extremism."<sup>299</sup> A more vicious attack on Aoun comes regularly in one of Future TV's most popular programs, Daily News Analysis. DNA serves as a platform for pro-Hariri host, Nadim Koteish, to defend Hariri and the March 14 alliance against the pro-Syrian, March 8 alliance, of which Aoun is an integral part.

While Future TV constantly promotes the Hariris and their movement, the station has attempted to emphasize a discourse of "national unity and coexistence," Rafik Hariri's main slogan.<sup>300</sup> During Hariri's first premiership between 1992 and 1998, Future TV's programs focused on attracting Arab viewers by being "a marketing tool used by the prime minister to present Leb-

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<sup>297</sup> Future News Evening Bulletin, December 7, 2013.

<sup>298</sup> Future TV News Bulletin, February 22, 2013.

<sup>299</sup> Future TV Interview with Michel Mouawad, President of the Independence Movement. Broadcast on February 23, 2013.

<sup>300</sup> "Political and Religious Leaders Pay Tribute to Hariri," *The Daily Star*, February 15, 2013.

anon as a center of civil peace in the region with tourist attractions worthy of hefty investments from Gulf Arabs."<sup>301</sup> After Hariri's assassination, the station became the primary voice of the anti-Syrian, March 14 opposition, which included Christian, Sunni, Shiite, and Druze factions. As Hamade puts it, "Future became the platform for all opposition factions [launching] a massive campaign playing hundreds of clips, songs, shows, anything to mobilize the people. If you were at home watching the images of the Lebanese flags 24 hours a day, you might stay at home for the first few days but eventually you felt compelled to go down and join the demonstrations."<sup>302</sup> Future TV's less sectarian discourse, however, does not absolve it from being a fiercely propagandistic instrument, for its opponents accuse it of being a Sunni mouthpiece. Like OTV and Al-Manar, Future TV's news bulletin is heavily editorialized and politicized. However, the bulk of its programming, as with other profit-driven private stations, is focused on social and entertainment news.

### ***3.3.4 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI)***

Although an organ of the Maronite Christians, LBCI, in the years after Hariri's assassination, has leaned towards moderation. Established in 1985 during the civil war and operating from the Christian area of Adma, LBCI was the media platform of the Maronite supporters of the Christian Lebanese Forces. However, when the leader of the Forces, Samir Geagea, was imprisoned in 1990 for political reasons, LBCI's ownership was transferred to Geagea's associate and co-founder, Pierre Daher. The latter converted the station from partisan politics to a revenue-generating entertainment station. After launching its satellite transmission in 1996, LBCI be-

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<sup>301</sup> Fandy, *Uncivil War of Worlds*

<sup>302</sup> Ali Jaafar, "Crossing the Great Divide," *Daily Variety*, May 2, 2005.



came, for a period of time, the most popular station in Lebanon and the Arab world, especially for the "soft-porn nature of its programming."<sup>303</sup>

When Geagea was released from prison, he reclaimed ownership of the station,<sup>304</sup> prompting a legal dispute over LBCI's ownership between Geagea and Daher in November 2007.<sup>305</sup> Daher maintained that the issue was not over ownership but over who controlled LBCI's news and political programs, accusing Geagea of wanting to control the station politically. In his words, "It is a battle over media freedom and over the freedom of a media institution that doesn't believe in partisanship or political restraints."<sup>306</sup>

The Lebanese Forces, who have not had an aggressive media channel to promote their agenda particularly since the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, resorted to online media as a temporary fix while awaiting their original station. They established Lebanese Forces Television Station (LFTV). During the launching of the network, Geagea complained that some political factions were "dragging Lebanese media down using it as a mere tool for political propaganda filled with misperceptions, slanders, allegations, and personal offences." He said the network would not replace the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, stressing that LBCI would return to its original owners.<sup>307</sup>

During the Syrian hegemony, LBCI suffered, like other media outlets, from Syrian monitoring and censorship of political programming. Its board members included pro-Syrian politicians and business men. To protect itself from Syrian pressure, LBCI sought alliances with Saudi media entrepreneurs, including princes Al-Walid bin Sultan and Al-Walid bin Talal. In 2002,

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<sup>303</sup> Fandy, *Uncivil War of Words*.

<sup>304</sup> "Lebanese Forces Protest TV Decision to Call off Interview with Leader," *The Daily Star*, November 17, 2007.

<sup>305</sup> "Lebanese Judiciary Issues Indictment in Favor of Political Party in Media Case," *The Daily Star*, October 15, 2010.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> "Lebanese Forces Launches Own Web- Based TV," *The daily Star*, July 28, 2011.

LBCI entered into a joint venture with *Al-Hayat* newspaper, owned by the Saudi prince, Khaled bin Sultan. The venture resulted in the production of a televised newscast.<sup>308</sup> In 2003, prince Al-Walid Bin Talal bought 49 percent of the station's shares, a move prohibited by law as foreigners are not allowed to own shares in Lebanese media. The exception was made because of Bin Talal's importance and his blood relation to a former Lebanese prime minister.<sup>309</sup>

The LBCI-Saudi connection helped the station acquire a pan-Arab reputation, which counter-balanced its generally pro-Western style.<sup>310</sup> Its varied programming, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan, has attracted a large Muslim audience. One Saudi entrepreneur even said that he was able "to influence LBCI's programming and curb the un-Islamic nature of its shows."<sup>311</sup> While his claims may be exaggerated, it is a fact that the Saudi influence on LBCI increased after Al-Walid bin Talal bought half of its shares. LBCI's ad revenues, for example, took a direct hit following the airing of a controversial episode on "Ahmar bel Khat Al- Arid" (Bold Red Line), when the show interviewed a man from Saudi Arabia bragging about his sex life on camera, where talking about sex in public is considered a "sin." While the show's ratings skyrocketed, the man was dragged to court, the show was suspended for four months, and the LBCI offices in Jeddah were shut down.<sup>312</sup>

While LBCI has been characterized as leaning towards the March 14 alliance, it has also covered the opposing side—a fact which makes the station harder to brand. One of its lead reporters, Denise Rahme Fakhri, sued LBCI, accusing the station of laying her off because of her political support for Geagea.<sup>313</sup> However, the station is still regarded as leaning toward the anti-

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<sup>308</sup> Fandy, *Uncivil War of Words*.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 1280.

<sup>311</sup> Fandy, 1136.

<sup>312</sup> Mohammed Jamjoom, "TV Station's Saudi Office Closed after Showing Man's Sex Life," *CNN*, August 10, 2009.

<sup>313</sup> IREX 2009, 79.

Syrian, pro-March 14 side. One of the most vicious attacks waged at LBCI was the assassination attempt in 2005 targeting one of the station's most prominent anti-Syrian, Maronite journalists, May Chidiac. A bomb exploded from under Chidiac's car seat causing her severe injuries. Chidiac blamed the attempt on the Syrian regime.<sup>314</sup>

LBCI runs a number of very popular political and social talk shows including “Naharkom Said” (Good Day), and “Kalam Ennas”(People's Talk), considered the leading talk show in Lebanon.<sup>315</sup> However, the bulk of its programs are drama, reality television, and social and entertainment programs.

### 3.4 The Lebanese Press

While this study is primarily concerned with television, a brief look at the print media will give a more comprehensive view of the overall media climate. Compared with its Arab neighbors, the Lebanese press stands out for its ability to report and criticize freely as well its resistance to government efforts to silence it. It is protected by Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution, which guarantees “the freedom to express one's opinion orally or in writing, the freedom of the press, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of association.”<sup>316</sup> Lebanon's newspapers are, on the whole, noncommercial and their content “usually carries clear political and ideological undertones.”<sup>317</sup> A wide range of publications includes a good number of Arabic dailies, weeklies, and monthlies that provide a rich variety of reportage.<sup>318</sup> There are also three French language dailies, one in English, and one in Armenian. Popular Arabic dailies include

<sup>314</sup> International Federation of Journalists Press Release, September 27, 2005.

<sup>315</sup> <http://www.lbcgroup.tv/kalam-ennas-en/description>

<sup>316</sup> The Lebanese Constitution (1926), Chapter II, “Rights and Duties of the Citizens,” Article 13.

<sup>317</sup> Mapping Digital Media, 21.

<sup>318</sup> IREX Report 2010-2011, 8. *Al-Anwar*, *Al-Bayrak*, *Al-Hayat*, *Al-Liwaa*, *Al-Mustaqbal*, *Annahar*, and *Ashark* are considered to be pro-March 14 (anti-Syrian); *Al-Akhbar*, *Addiyar*, and *Assafir* are known to support the March 8. *Al-Balad* is considered to be neutral.

*Annahar* (The Day) and *Assafir* (The Ambassador); they are deemed to have the highest circulation with 45,000 daily.<sup>319</sup> *Al-Akhbar* (The News) is gaining popularity for its unconventional and scoop style reportage. However, because publishers don't reveal circulation figures, experts estimate that no Lebanese newspaper sells more than 10,000 copies on its best day, with an average of 7,000 to 8,000 a day.<sup>320</sup> The low circulation figures imply that newspapers can hardly survive from sales and advertisements and, therefore, seek other sources of funding, which normally come from "outside sources."<sup>321</sup>

Since the first daily *Hadikat Al-Akhbar* (The Garden of the News) in 1858, Lebanon grew to become the center of Arab thought and free expression. The country witnessed a proliferation of dailies which reflected the diversity and contradictions associated with the local sociopolitical spectrum as well as the ideological divisions in the Arab world. Between 1943 and 1975, the press was characterized by "dynamism, diversity, relative freedom, and the attraction of Arab intellectuals and dissidents to Beirut."<sup>322</sup> Newspapers were at the heart of media life since radio and television were state-owned channels of communication.<sup>323</sup> As Hannah Ziadeh points out, "It was a place where what could not be said from Baghdad to Rabat could be splashed as a headline and where journalists like the late Samir Kassir, were prepared to pay the ultimate price for standing up for the truth."<sup>324</sup>

While freedom of the press is protected, the press law, which dates back to 1962, bars publications from threatening national security, national unity, state frontiers, or insulting senior

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> IREX 20010-2011, 11.

<sup>321</sup> Nabil Dajani, "Ethics and the Media: The Lebanese Experience," *Conference on Bioethics in the Media*, December 11, 2012.

<sup>322</sup> This period extends from the year Lebanon achieved independence from French mandate in 1943 until the outbreak of the civil war in 1975.

<sup>323</sup> Ziad Majed, "Lebanon: An Overview of the Media," In *Information and Public Choice: From Media Markets to Policy Making*, ed. Roumeen Islam (Washington D.C : The World Bank), 209.

<sup>324</sup> Ziadeh, "In Defense of National Television: A Personal Account of Eclectic Lebanese Media Affinities."

Lebanese officials or foreign heads of state. This has resulted in occasional government interference by banning certain publications or fining journalists. However, on the whole, and through measures of self-regulation, the press has been able to protect itself. Magda Abu Fadil maintains that "Lebanon's media laws have worked to buffer excessive governmental or corporate interference in the media's affairs." She cites the cases of *Annahar* and *Assafir*, which, under the protection of the law, "challenged harassment—and sometimes censorship—by taking their cases to the courts and safeguarding their rights."<sup>325</sup> However, the main force that shields the press against government intervention is the plural nature of the society and the caution to preserve sectarian balance. As Caroline Attie explains, "The necessity of maintaining a political balance among Lebanon's multi-confessional groups sustained the freedom of the press and accounted for the government's reluctance to exercise censorship."<sup>326</sup>

The Lebanese press has continuously reflected and actively participated in the Lebanese identity crisis: previously, by joining the Arabism-Lebanism divide of the civil war years, and presently, through taking sides in the pro-Syrian/Iranian (March 8), anti-Syrian/ Iranian (March 14) divide. Because of the free environment in which it operates, and the association of local groups with foreign causes, foreign governments today, as in the past, have used the Lebanese press to promote their agendas. As Dajani points out, "The tendency of Lebanese journalists to speak for specific sectarian groups and to promote their interests led newspapers in Lebanon to concentrate more on the presentation of views and opinions than on news and facts. This gave outside powers and interests the opportunity, through the Lebanese media, to play active roles in the affairs of Lebanon."<sup>327</sup> For example, the Arab nationalist discourse adopted by Egyptian

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<sup>325</sup> Magda Abu Fadil, "Lebanese Media Far From Being Accountable," *The Huffington Post*, February 4, 2013.

<sup>326</sup> Caroline Attie, *Struggle in the Levant: Lebanon in the 1950s* (Oxford: The Lebanese Center in Association with I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd), 131.

<sup>327</sup> Dajani, 2012.

President Jamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s created divisions in the Lebanese press between pro-Nasserite and anti-Nasserite dailies. As Murawic points out, "When Colonel Abdel Nasser wanted to sell an idea and did not want his domestic organ, *Al-Ahram* (The Pyramids) to be the source, a Nasserite daily in Beirut took care of it."<sup>328</sup> Also, anti and pro-Nasserite political parties at the time had their own publications, including *Al-Amal* (Hope) of the Maronite Phalange party, and *Sawt Al-Uruba* (The voice of Arabism) of the Arab Nationalist Party. There were equally pro-Western dailies, such as *Annahar* (The Day) and *Lissan Ul-Hal* (The Mouthpiece). During the war, the Lebanese press had patrons. For example, *Addoustour* (The Constitution) and *Al-Watan Al-Arabi* (The Arab Nation) were financed by Iraq, while *Al-Hawadis* (The Events), by Saudi Arabia. William Rugh maintains that "*Annida* (The Call), *Asharq* (The Orient), *Assafir* (The Ambassador) and *Al-Kifah* (The Struggle) had connections and probably received subsidies from Russia, Syria, Libya and Iraq, respectively."<sup>329</sup>

While most newspapers today are not transparent about their political funding, some have openly acknowledged that they receive political money. The editor of the pro-March 8 daily *Addiyar*, Charles Ayyoub, acknowledged in an editorial that his newspaper receives funding from political sources, including Hariri, Hezbollah and Syria.<sup>330</sup> Similarly the pro-Syrian *Al-Akhbar* (The News) was said to have had received money from Qatar. When Qatar publicly denounced the Assad crackdown in Syria and withdrew its funding from *Al-Akhbar*, the newspaper suddenly began publish pieces criticizing the Gulf kingdom, previously a subject off limits to its journalists.<sup>331</sup> Those who opposed the political direction of *Al-Akhbar*, including its deputy direc-

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<sup>328</sup> Laurent Murawic, *Princes of Darkness: The Saudi Assault on the West* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc), 62.

<sup>329</sup> William A. Rugh, *The Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics* (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 91.

<sup>330</sup> "Assafir Announces Deal with Investor," *The Daily Star*, September 20, 2011.

<sup>331</sup> IREX 2010-2011, 6.

tor Khaled Saghie, felt compelled to resign in protest over the paper's bias in support of the Syrian regime.<sup>332</sup> Political money was also needed at a time of severe financial constraints in the media industry, as several newspapers and television stations could no longer rely on advertising alone and had to lay off a huge number of employees.<sup>333</sup>

The association or dissociation of Lebanese journalists with and from political agendas sometimes cost some their lives. In December 2005, the Christian Orthodox editor of *Annahar*, Gebran Tueni, was killed presumably by Syrian forces for his harsh criticism of Syria's policy in Lebanon and for calling on Syria to leave. Similarly, Samir Kassir, a columnist for *Annahar* and a critic of Syria, had also been killed for the same reasons five months earlier.<sup>334</sup>

The political rift between supporters and opponents of Syria characteristic of the present political climate in Lebanon has been clearly expressed in the press. The Hariri owned *Al-Mustaqbal* (The Future) became the mouthpiece of the anti-Syrian, anti-Iranian, March 14 camp. Founded in 1996 at the height of Syrian presence in Lebanon, *Al-Mustaqbal* had, up until the assassination of Hariri, adopted a pan-Arab and pro-Syrian discourse. After Hariri's assassination, the newspaper, as other Hariri-owned media, shifted its discourse to become the harshest and most vitriolic critic of Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah. Another generally anti-Syrian daily is *Annahar* (the Day). Established in 1933 by Ghassan Tueni and his Greek Orthodox family, *Annahar* has been characterized by a liberal pro-Western orientation without denying its roots and Arab affiliations. Fandy calls the daily "the Greek Orthodox representation of the opposition voice in Lebanon, which, for decades, has publicly denounced Syria's presence in the country."<sup>335</sup> The daily's former editor, the late Gebran Tueni, was renowned for his aggressive defense of Lebanon's

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<sup>332</sup> Nicolas Dot-Pouillard, "La Crise Syrienne Dechire les Gauche Arabes," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 2012.

<sup>333</sup> Mayssa Zeidan, "Lebanese Media Forced into Layoffs," *The National*, October 14, 2009.

<sup>334</sup> In 1966, Kamel Mroueh, the liberal Shiite founder of the prominent pan-Arab daily *Al-Hayat*, was assassinated by pro-Nasserite forces for disagreeing with Abdel Nasser's pan Arab discourse.

<sup>335</sup> Fandy, 1288.

freedom and for his "open letters" to the Syrian regime. In one letter, dated March 23, 2000, five years before the military withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon, Tueni addressed President Bashar Al-Assad saying: "You must realize that many Lebanese are not at ease with Syrian policy in Lebanon or with the presence of Syrian troops in our country."<sup>336</sup> Following the assassination of Hariri and others in 2005, Tueni intensified his critical rhetoric of Syria and directly accused it of the crimes. In an editorial on December 8, 2005, Tueni told Syrian regime that it "should know...that despotic regimes and tyrants who committed massacres against humanity were pursued, prosecuted, and they collapsed."<sup>337</sup> It was only four days later that Tueni was assassinated in a car explosion.

Despite its anti-Syrian orientation, *Annahar*, after 2008, gradually reshaped its coverage towards more balance. As observers have pointed out, the paper now "is neither fish nor fowl."<sup>338</sup> It has tried to adopt a moderate approach that covers a variety of points of view. Its editorial team is varied and includes writers of all political leanings.

The polarized discourse of the other end also has its press voice in *Assafir* (The Ambassador) and *Al-Akhbar* (The News). *Assafir* has, since its founding in 1974, followed a pan-Arab line. During the civil war, *Assafir* supported the Palestinian forces against the Lebanese Christian warring factions; during the Syrian hegemony over Lebanon, *Assafir* was supportive of Syria's policy; in the post-Syrian era, the daily has, on the whole, been the mouthpiece of the Hezbollah-led March 8 camp and has supported the Hezbollah-led 'Islamic resistance' against Israel and, more broadly, against the United States. *Al-Akhbar*, on the other hand, describes itself as leaning to the left and belonging to the camp of the opposition to American "imperialism." A relatively young daily, it has succeeded at attracting attention due to its sensational news cover-

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<sup>336</sup> "Gebran Tueni Quotes," *Lebanese Free Thinker*, March 23, 2000.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, December 8, 2008.

<sup>338</sup> "Media Landscape: Lebanon," *European Journalism Center*, 2010.



age and lookout for scoops. Its first issue came out on August 14, 2006, 33 days after the beginning of the July War.<sup>339</sup> Its editorial chairman, Ibrahim Al-Amine, stated that it aims to have "the U.S. ambassador wake up in the morning, read it, and get upset." The paper is known to be heavily supportive of Hezbollah and Syria despite the fact that it is occasionally critical of the politics and ideologies of this camp.<sup>340</sup> *Al-Akhbar's* managing editor said that the daily has an anti-imperialism project in its resistance to neoliberal economic policies and its support for Hezbollah's fight against Israel. While its opponents accuse it of receiving financial support from Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah, its managing editor denies these accusations, claiming that funds come from a private London banker.<sup>341</sup>

The Lebanese mediascape is, thus, reflective of a complex sociopolitical environment where both local and foreign factors intersect. The plural and consociational character of the media echoes that of the political system, which guarantees that every main community is represented and possesses a media outlet. This system has secured the balance of power among the sects and shielded the media from government control. However, it has also placed media professionals under the mercy of their political and sectarian patrons, which raises questions about their true freedom. Since the Lebanese polity is constantly susceptible to foreign intervention, the media, which are owned by sectarian and political leaders, are often enmeshed in local and geopolitical disputes. This has prevented them, on the whole, from promoting the nation-building much needed after the end of the civil war. However, this is not to argue that they *should* have necessarily done so, for the issues that the Lebanese polity and the media have had to deal with in the post-Syrian era are too heavy to cope with. The political rift between the pro-Syrian,

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<sup>339</sup> The July War was a war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, which lasted 33 days.

<sup>340</sup> "Mapping Digital Media," 21.

<sup>341</sup> Robert F. Worth, "Rarity in Region: Lebanese Paper Dares to Provoke," *The New York Times*, December 28, 2010.

March 8 camp and the anti-Syrian, March 14 camp is the driving force behind the media today. All political news published is molded within this polarized framework. The four television networks discussed earlier, each of which is allied to a political party with a different agenda, reflect the deep sociopolitical divisions in the country. Moreover, the allegiance of the sectarian groups to foreign powers and their drive for profit invites "political money," which foreign powers, such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran and Qatar, have used to win Lebanese editorial support. The following chapter will critically analyze television discourse as presented on the four television networks discussed above. Its purpose is to delve deeper into the nature of the discourse in order to evaluate its *function* in the present sociopolitical setting.

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## **CHAPTER 4: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: HOW FOUR NEWS STORIES ARE REPORTED IN LEBANESE MEDIA**

The news stories analyzed in this chapter reflect critical and controversial issues currently preoccupying the Lebanese political and media scenes. The four television networks chosen for the analysis—Orange TV (OTV), Al-Manar, Future TV, and the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI)—have covered the stories extensively, and, as mentioned earlier, are the networks that represent the schism characterizing the overall political climate in Lebanon. OTV and Al-Manar represent pro-Syrian, Maronite and Shiite discourse; Future TV and LBCI represent anti-Syrian Sunni and Maronite discourse. While the analysis is focused on television discourse, a look at newspaper discourse, in some cases, will help provide supplementary evidence for a more comprehensive analysis.

The first story, "The Orthodox Law," revolves around debate over an electoral law that will govern parliamentary elections in June 2013. The debate has raised political and sectarian tensions between the Christians and the Sunnis and between the Sunnis and the Shiites, who are competing over fair representation of their communities in the body politic. This story is a powerful illustration of the latent fears and mutual alienations characterizing Lebanese inter-sectarian relations. It is significant because it occurs at a point of heightened religiosity and sectarian awareness both in Lebanon and the region.

The second story, "Reporting the Syrian War," illustrates how Lebanese media have reported the war in next-door Syria, an event with local impact and geopolitical significance. The analysis probes whether and how local sectarian and political divisions in Lebanese society take geopolitical dimensions.

The intersection of the local and the geopolitical is further emphasized in the third story, "Sunni Radicals." This story describes the rise of Sunni radical groups in parts of Lebanon as a result of the association of Lebanese Sunni and Shiite groups with their co-religionists fighting in Syria. It is significant because it describes the strategic importance such an association represents for these two sects in terms of their power struggle and identity.

The fourth story, "Wage Protests," demonstrates a socio-economic condition. Unlike the previous three, it does not reflect identity struggles; it illustrates worker unions' attempts at pressuring the government for wage increases. It is equally significant because it directly concerns people's basic needs. The analysis probes how the media report a socio-economic issue that affects people's lives and whether the discourse is similar to, or different from, that used in the previous three stories.

Following Van Dijk's method of Critical Discourse Analysis, a close reading of the stories will focus on three dimensions: semantic macrostructures or "global meanings" that will be depicted from the story leads; semantic microstructures, or local meanings of the news stories, with a focus on argumentative techniques, naming choices and the creation of in-group, out-group identities; and identification of "context models" or belief structures that justify the use of a particular language in a defined social environment.<sup>342</sup> The purpose of the analysis, as Van Dijk explains, is "to understand the discursive structures of argumentation [by making] explicit their functional roles in the communicative manipulation of other minds in socio-cultural contexts."<sup>343</sup> Thus, an analysis of the news reports should reveal the argumentative structures and their role in the reinforcement or attenuation of sectarian beliefs and attitudes within the present

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<sup>342</sup> Teun Adrianus Van Dijk, *News Analysis: Case Studies of National and International News in the Press* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1988).

<sup>343</sup> Teun Van Dijk, *Racism and Argumentation: Race Riot Rhetoric in Tabloid Editorials*, In *Argumentation Illuminated*, ed. F. H. van Eemeren (Dordrecht: Foris), 248.

sociopolitical context. Each discourse analysis is preceded by a presentation of the story and a thorough explanation of the political context against which it is examined.

## **4.1 The Orthodox Law**

### ***4.1.1 The story***

Lebanese politicians have debated an electoral law that would govern forthcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2013. If passed, the law would allow people to vote for parliament members who are exclusively from their sect. Maronite parliamentarians, for example, would only be elected by Maronite voters; Sunni MPs by Sunni voters, and Shiite MPs by Shiite voters, etc. This practice would be a first in Lebanese elections, as members of parliament cannot access office only through the votes of their co-religionists; they must secure a plurality of the total votes from voters of all sects. While the Orthodox Law, as the project came to be called, seems to have united—at least for a while—the majority of the Christian groups despite their political feuds, it has particularly angered the Sunnis and Druze, who fear that their blocs in parliament, which include non-Sunnis and non-Druze, would shrink.<sup>344</sup>

The Christian rhetoric, most aggressively articulated by General Michel Aoun, has stressed the urgent need for the Orthodox Law on the grounds that the current electoral law denies Christians fair representation because Christian lawmakers are elected mostly by non-Christian voters. The Sunni and Druze rhetoric, communicated primarily by the Sunni-dominated Future Parliamentary Bloc, equated the law with isolationism and backwardness. It raised fears that the Law might turn people into "sectarian villages not united by national interest," which

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<sup>344</sup> "MPs Focus on Districting but Fail to Answer Right Questions," *The Daily Star*, January 11, 2013.

"gives the wrong message about Lebanon."<sup>345</sup> The Orthodox Law has deepened the sectarian abyss engulfing the Lebanese sociopolitical climate and ignited a media war epitomized by the faceoff between the Christian OTV and the Sunni Future TV. Before analyzing the reportage of the story, quick mention should be made of the electoral system in Lebanon and the socio-political context within which the story has developed.

#### **4.1.2 The Context**

The Lebanese electoral system was designed to secure equal representation between Christians and Muslims. This formula reflects the consociational accord that the Taef Agreement stipulated to alleviate tensions among the sectarian groups. The 128 seats in the Lebanese parliament are distributed among Christians and Muslims on a 50:50-ratio.<sup>346</sup> While elections take place in various electoral districts according to a single list Party Bloc Vote system,<sup>347</sup> voters may cross-list candidates from competing lists within a district as long as the sectarian balance is not affected.<sup>348</sup> The candidates that receive a plurality of the total votes represent their community in parliament. Candidates, however, are not only elected by their co-religionists; while they are opposed by their co-religionists, they must seek support from outside their faith to be elected. This system was devised to increase cross-sectarian cooperation and minimize sectarian cleavages.<sup>349</sup> For example, eight deputies run to fill the seats of one of the five electoral districts: two Druze, three Maronites, two Sunni, and one Catholic. These deputies may run independently or

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<sup>345</sup> "Geagea: Orthodox Law only Proposal with Sufficient Support," *The Daily Star*, January 15, 2013.

<sup>346</sup> The 64 seats allocated to the Christian community are distributed among 34 Maronites, 14 Greek Orthodox, 8 Greek Catholics, 5 Armenian Orthodox, 1 Armenian Catholic, 1 Protestant, and 1 for Christian minorities. The 64 seats allocated to the Muslim community are distributed among 27 Sunnis, 27 Shiites, 8 Druze, and 2 Alawites.

<sup>347</sup> This type of voting enables voters to one vote for a pre-determined list rather than particular candidates. The list that wins a plurality of the votes in a particular electoral district wins all the seats in the district. However, in Lebanon, voters may choose candidates across lists by adding and subtracting names from competing lists as long as sectarian balance is preserved.

<sup>348</sup> Bassel Salloukh, "The Limits of Electoral Engineering in Divided Societies: Elections in Postwar Lebanon," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 39, No. 3 (2006): 640.

<sup>349</sup> Imad Salamey and Rhys Payne, "Parliamentary Consociationalism in Lebanon: Equal Citizenry versus Quotated Confessionalism," *Journal of Legislative Studies* 14, no. 4 (2008): 464.

in joint electoral lists. The voters in this particular district, regardless of their sectarian affiliation, vote for these eight members.

This system, however, has not favored all groups. Political and sectarian leaders have continuously quarreled over the issue of electoral districting, as electoral districts, in all post-civil war elections, have been purposefully gerrymandered to favor certain leaders or serve the interests of anti-and pro-Syrian groups. For example, anti-Syrian Christians have complained that constituency boundaries have been gerrymandered to allow the election of Shiite parliamentarians from Shiite-dominated constituencies with strong Hezbollah influence, while allocating many Christian parliamentarians to Muslim-majority constituencies, forcing Christian politicians to be elected by Muslim votes and represent Muslim interests.<sup>350</sup> In order to guarantee victory, sectarian leaders who are normally "ideologically" opposed form coalitions just to win seats. This, as Imad Salameh argues, reflects "the meager role that ideology plays in political party platforms in comparison with the wheeling and dealing between the sectarian political elite."<sup>351</sup>

One reason behind the Christian fervor toward the Orthodox Law is a need to exhibit a sense of presence amid insecurity. In the words of Tarek Mitri, "The anxiety of Christians in the Arab world is evident. It arises from the effects of their dwindling numbers, the economic and political failures of the national states, and fears in the face of rising Islamism. Preoccupation with survival affects both their reading of history and their reflections on the future."<sup>352</sup> Moreover, the rise of Christophobia witnessed in many Muslim countries where Christian minorities are said to be persecuted and killed,<sup>353</sup> along with the rise of Sunni fundamentalism in countries

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<sup>350</sup> Arda Arsenian Ekmekji, "Confessionalism and Electoral Reform in Lebanon," The Aspen Institute, July 2012.

<sup>351</sup> Salameh, 464.

<sup>352</sup> Tarek Mitri, "Christians in the Arab World: Minority Attitudes and Citizenship," *The Ecumenical Review*, no. 1 (2012): 44.

<sup>353</sup> Ayaan Hisri Ali, "Christophobia: From One End of the Muslim World to the Other, Christians Are Being Murdered For Their Faith," *Newsweek*, February 13, 2012.

of the Arab Spring, most notably Syria, and the association of Sunni Salafists in Lebanon with the Syrian Sunni opposition, has alarmed many Lebanese Christians. On the other hand, the rising power of the Shiites in Lebanon, demographically, politically, and militarily, as well as their association with Iran and Syria, has equally worried Lebanese Christians. This partly explains the almost unanimous stance on the Law by the majority of the Christian groups (excluding independent Christians who fiercely oppose the Law). Surprisingly, the Lebanese Forces and the Phalanges sided with their rivals, the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah, insisting that the Orthodox Law would provide fair Christian representation. One *Al-Monitor* analyst explains why the Phalanges, who are opposed to Aoun, voted in favor of the Law. In his words, they "view Muslims, Sunnis, Shiites, and Druze from the same angle when it comes to the "usurped rights of Christians" in parliament."<sup>354</sup> The Law is also said to be to Hezbollah's advantage if undertaken on the basis of Proportional Representation—which worries the Future Movement, who believes that Hezbollah resorted to this law to secure a majority in parliament.

#### ***4.1.3 Discourse Analysis***

A. A careful reading of Orange TV's presentation of the story reveals Christian fears from a presupposed Sunni dominance. In the opening introduction of the news bulletin on January 15, OTV's anchor made the following statement:

Why this support for the Orthodox Law? Numbers have revealed many truths, most importantly that 450,000 Christians will be delivered from the hegemony of the Future Movement [the Sunni-led movement]. Also it [the law] gives Christians the chance to

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<sup>354</sup> Eli Hajj, "Political Alliances are Shifting and Rifts Widening as Legislators again Take up a New Electoral Law," *Al-Monitor*, January 14, 2013.

vote for whomever they wish in parliament and prevents Christian MPs from being elected through non-Christian votes, which makes them hostages to other groups.<sup>355</sup>

The discourse focuses on the Christian point of view that corresponds to a belief system prevalent among Christians who support Aoun. The discourse implies that a strong wave of Sunni fundamentalism surging in Lebanon and the region poses a threat to minorities. The discourse, however, focuses on Sunni hegemony and ignores another potential threat some other Christian groups are concerned with: Shiite hegemony. The discourse's disregard of this other presupposed threat is justified by the political and strategic alliance between Aoun and Hezbollah. This context model, which demonizes Sunnis in the eyes of some Christians, has been building up in Aounist Maronite discourse since 2005 and has been used as a tool by Maronites to legitimize their political choices. It is by building on the fears and *Ihbat* (frustration) of the Christian minority that their leaders are able to maneuver their political actions.

The first argumentative point explains why there is support for the Orthodox Law. By using numbers as supportive evidence, the point's function is to prove that Christians are, in fact, under the mercy of the Sunni Future movement. The *truth* and the number *450,000* are used as drama enhancing tools to imply that there is truth that ought to be revealed. The use of *delivered* is meant to emphasize their forced submission and eventual freedom if the Law is passed. The use of *hegemony* suggests that the Sunnis are rising in power and, therefore, should be feared and quelled.

The second argumentative point is meant to show that Christians have a choice and can be delivered from this supposed hegemony if they support the Law. The idea that the Law will *prevent Christian MPs from being elected by non-Christian votes* is a rhetorical contrast meant to emphasize the gap between the Christian MPs in parliament and who they actually represent.

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<sup>355</sup> OTV Prime-Time News Bulletin, January 15, 2013.

This is further emphasized by the metaphor *hostages to other groups* to imply that the Christians are the victimized group in Lebanon and they are denied a free will by unjust electoral laws that have worked in favor of other sects. While the argument does not blatantly mention the phrase *hostages to the Sunnis* (although it implies it), as such discourse would be extremely inflammatory, the word *other groups* serves as a euphemism or tactical disclaimer to save face. The theme, summary, or "global meaning" one may retrieve from this lead may be articulated as follows: the Sunnis are a threat; the Christians are victimized; the Law is the salvation. Local meanings are highly argumentative and drama enhancing but are constructed in a way that corresponds to a belief system or "context model" that is socially appropriate to the Aounist Maronites.

**B.** Future TV's discourse demonized Aoun, portraying him as the source of Lebanon's troubles. As the Law would not be to the advantage of the Hariri-led Future Movement, the discourse presented the Law as unfair and regressive. A report broadcast on Future TV on January 19, 2013 articulated this view of the Law:

For the General [Aoun] and his media, Lebanon is not a nation but confessional cantons. It is the Aounist TV channel that is propagating the Orthodox Law under the logo of fair representation. In reality it is only deceiving people, who, according to the orange logic, have become rival tribes...It is the intimidation of the 'other'—the Sunni—in the Aounist mind.<sup>356</sup>

The lead names Aoun *the General*. This naming choice is not uncommon when referring to Aoun. In normal situations, he is mostly referred to as General Aoun, or General Michel Aoun, or Aoun upon second reference. The use of *the General* in this structure implies irony and sarcasm. Aoun, in the eyes of his adversaries, is a failed general. His adversaries mock him for having lost every war he waged, creating divisions among the Christians, weakening their position

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<sup>356</sup> Future TV Prime-Time New Bulletin, January 19, 2013.



vis a vis other sects, inciting sectarian tension among Christians and Sunnis, and siding with his former adversaries, Syria and Hezbollah.<sup>357</sup> The naming of his TV channel as "Aounist" implies derogation, as it associates the network with the man they mock, as well as accuses the channel of propagating a project, which is, in fact, deceiving people.

The lead makes the following argumentative point: *For the General and his media, Lebanon is not a nation, but confessional cantons*. This clearly accuses Aoun and his media of propagating a rhetoric that undermines "national unity," an ideal emphasized in the Taef Agreement. But Aoun, in this presentation, is the one doing the undermining. In fact, the word *canton* has not traditionally been highly regarded in Lebanese political discourse. Politicians have refrained from proposing it as a solution to the Lebanese predicament because of a general tendency to view such a solution as undermining national unity and emphasizing sectarian divisions.<sup>358</sup> The phrase *orange logic* is used to mock Aoun's thinking. While orange is the color of Aoun's logo, a logic that is orange is a metonymy meant to reduce Aoun to the logo that his adversaries continuously mock.<sup>359</sup>

To emphasize Aoun's role in dividing the Lebanese people, the hyperbolic phrase *rival tribes* is used. It implies that Aoun wants to bring his people to a state of nature where tribes compete for power. It also serves as persuasive imagery, portraying Aoun's logic as anti-civilizational.

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<sup>357</sup> See *The Shattered Pottery: The Michel Aoun Project 1988-2009*.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fctTdAOtaWc&list=PL10D7582497641A1C>

<sup>358</sup> The idea of cantonization or federalism has been proposed by some groups, mostly Christians, as a solution to Lebanon's sectarian divisions. They proposed a model similar to the Swiss canton system. However, the idea has not appealed to Arabists and Islamists who fear such a move might harm Islamic unity. Philip Smyth maintains that "Criticism of Lebanese federalism has also concentrated on the idea that it is merely an effort to preserve Christian power." See Philip Smyth, "Lebanese Federalism and Decentralization: its Proponents and Discontents," *Middle East Political and Economic Institute*, October 25, 2009.

<sup>359</sup> The Free Patriotic Movement chose the orange color for their logo being the color associated with peaceful revolutions.

The above discourse shows that Future TV, in a way, absolves Christians from being the cause of division and puts the blame exclusively on Aoun. The sectarian discourse is mitigated by adding the phrase *in the Aounist mind*. This is meant to say that *only* Christians who support Aoun subscribe to this logic of intimidation, not necessarily others. The discourse accuses Aoun of *deceiving* his followers and intimidating other groups.<sup>360</sup> This way, Future TV does not jeopardize the relations of its patrons with other Christian parties.

This story's theme focuses on Aoun as the out-group; the threat to national unity. The local meaning, like in the OTV broadcast, is based on highly argumentative language and corresponds to a belief system that is acceptable to an audience supportive of the Future Movement and Christian allies opposed to Aoun.

C. Al-Manar echoed Hezbollah's voice in supporting the Law. Hezbollah, Aoun's ally, supported the Orthodox Law on the basis of Proportional Representation. This formula alarms the Future Movement because it would give the Islamic party advantage over others. Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, stated that the Future Movement does not want proportionality because "such an option would reveal their true electoral weight."<sup>361</sup> The fact that Christian parties allied with the Future Bloc voted for the Law is gratifying to Hezbollah because he sees his main Sunni rival isolated. This is how an Al-Manar presenter articulated Hezbollah's gratification on January 19, 2013:

The Future Bloc is alone and isolated. The fear of isolation has pushed it to intimidate others by describing the Law as "the deadly sin and the suicidal project." The blue movement turns everything black whenever its interests are threatened.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Future TV Prime-Time News Bulletin, January 13, 2013.

<sup>361</sup> "Hezbollah Says Would Vote for Orthodox Proposal," *The Daily Star*, January 25, 2013.

<sup>362</sup> Al-Manar Prime-Time News Bulletin, January 19, 2013.

The discourse is vindictive. By describing the Future Bloc as *alone and isolated*, Al-Manar mocks its adversary for being stabbed in the back. The Bloc is supposedly isolated because its Christian allies—the Lebanese Forces and the Phalanges—voted in favor of the Orthodox Law. By directly quoting the Future Bloc, who described the Law as a *deadly sin* and a *suicidal project*, Al-Manar implies that the Future Bloc, whose *fear of isolation* is *intimidating* other groups, is threatening to take action. This is emphasized further with a rhetorical contrast: *the blue movement* (in the reference to the blue color of their logo) *turns everything black*. This may be understood as demonizing the Sunni-led Future Bloc who, according to the discourse, may become dangerous if its interests are jeopardized.

**D.** The Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBCI), in contrast to the three networks discussed above, does not seem to rely much on hyperbolic argumentation and rhetorical flourish. While there is a tendency to editorialize the news, LBCI's discourse is closer to balanced. Here's how a news anchor read the opening to a news bulletin on January 15, 2013:

For the first time, there seems to be an unbridled craze to know which electoral law will be decided upon. No agreement has yet been reached because of mutual vetoes. The Orthodox Law was approved by three major Christian parties, but it collides with categorical refusal by the Future Movement and the Progressive Socialist Party [the Druze party]. If adopting the Law is difficult, what is the alternative that will bring about fair representation?<sup>363</sup>

Most Lebanese news reporting tends to analyze events rather than simply report them. However, the above lead was more balanced and less partisan. The use of the phrase *unbridled craze* is an overstatement to emphasize the importance of the electoral law in determining power relations

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<sup>363</sup> LBCI Prime-Time News Bulletin, January 15, 2013.

among the sects. However, instead of accusing one side or the other, the discourse shows that both "parties to the conflict" are responsible because of *mutual vetoes*. The use of the verb *collide* emphasizes the strong refusal of the law by the Future Movement and the Progressive Socialist Party. It may imply that they are the ones complicating the negotiations. However, this lead leaves the question of the Law open to the viewer to investigate. In a way, it engages the public rather than leads them to believe one truth or another. The global meaning or theme in this lead is *deadlock over law*. Semantic structures are more informative than argumentative. The context model against which this story is told is a political situation characterized by severe disagreement over a major issue that will have a tremendous impact on the Lebanese people.

The Orthodox Law story provoked predictably mixed opinions in the Lebanese press. The mouthpiece of the Future Movement, *Al-Mustaqbal* (The Future), reflected the Movement's fears of a potential Hezbollah domination in case the Law is passed. In a piece titled "Hezbollah Does Not Want to Give the Christians their Rights; It Wants to Dominate the Country," Salah Taki Dine warned Christians against siding with Hezbollah on the Law because it would only give Hezbollah advantage over any other group.<sup>364</sup> This is the line of thought of the Future Movement, as communicated by one of its members, Ahmad Fatfat: "What is happening in the electoral laws is a conspiracy by Hezbollah to control the country through putting its hand on parliament. A Proportional Representation system would allow Hezbollah to eliminate others and control all the country's political foundations."<sup>365</sup> Other pieces called the Law "a bastard," and "a

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<sup>364</sup> Salah Taki Dine, "Hezbollah La Yurid I'taa Almasihiyin Hukukahom (Hezbollah Does Not Want to Give the Christians their Rights)," *Al-Mustaqbal*, January 17, 2013.

<sup>365</sup> *Annahar*, January 18, 2013.

plot aimed at reviving Christian fanaticism," showing the Law as regressive and as harming national unity.<sup>366</sup>

As an organ of the Future Movement, *Al-Mustaqbal* predictably fought the Law. In contrast, *Assafir* (The Ambassador), *Al-Akhbar* (The News), and *Annahar* (The Day), despite their pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian political leanings, published mixed views. The pan-Arab, leftist daily, *Assafir*, published opinions that condemn sectarianism. In "Neo-Sectarianism," Samir Makhoul bemoaned the Lebanese condition, blaming Lebanon's predicament on both internal and external factors. He accused the supporters of the Orthodox Law of "neo-sectarianism...those who wear the mask of modernity, only to hide beneath it sectarian thinking."<sup>367</sup> Similarly, Nasri Sayegh of *Assafir* wrote that, "The Orthodox project did not fall from the sky; it is the legitimate child of sectarianism and sectarian oppression."<sup>368</sup> On the other hand, being also a daily that leans to the March 8 alliance, it was expected to come across articles that support the Law. Eli Ferzli, the pro-Syrian politician who first proposed the Orthodox Law and who contributes to the daily, wrote that the Law served two functions: "to corner the Hariri-led opposition and embarrass the Christian leadership in the March 14 alliance for their failure to get approval of the law from their non-Christian allies."<sup>369</sup> While *Al-Akhbar* leans towards the March 8 group, it is also recognized for being bold and critical. For example, an article by Zeinab Hawi called the Orthodox Law "an expose of pure Christian fanaticism," and she ridiculed the Law campaign launched by OTV as "the campaign of orange shame."<sup>370</sup> Similarly, Nassif Azzi, in "A letter to Christians,"

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<sup>366</sup> See Bechara Khayrallah, "Al-Orthodoxy Al'lakit: Fal Yakon Thikruhu Mu'abbadann (The Bastard Orthodox: May it be Forever Forgotten)," *Al-Mustaqbal*, January 17, 2013.

<sup>367</sup> Samir Makhoul, "An'neotai'fiyya, (Neo-Sectarianism)," *Assafir*, January 17, 2013.

<sup>368</sup> Nasri Sayegh, "Mashrouh Allika al-Orthodoxy: Hatta Akher Masihi (The Project of the Orthodox Project: Until the Last Christian)," *Assafir*, January 14, 2013.

<sup>369</sup> Eli Ferzli, "Al-Orthodoxy Youaddi Wathifatahu: Iskat Assitin Wa Ihraj Al-Mouarada (The Orthodox Project Does its Job: Topple the 1960 Law and Embarrass the Opposition)," *Assafir* January 15, 2013.

<sup>370</sup> Zeinab Hawi, "Propagation of the Orthodox Law: The Ad of Orange Shame," (In Arabic) *Al-Akhbar*, January 15, 2013.

warned against the dangers of the Law while Adonis Akra, in "The Orthodox Project Defeats all deadly Bets," strongly defended it as suitable and fair for a country run by consensus.<sup>371</sup> *Annahar* (The Day) also published a variety of views, some of which treated the topic analytically, while others proposed solutions. Nabil Bu Monsef, in "Fear of Tomorrow," wrote that the Orthodox Law was the result of communal feelings of fear and marginalization; he argued that both Muslims and Christians had the responsibility to come up with laws that would be fair for all parties.<sup>372</sup>

The above analysis substantiates the sectarian separatism that underlies divisions over the Orthodox Law. Orange TV used polarized Maronite discourse articulated on the premise of "defending the Christians against a Sunni threat;" Future TV used polarized Sunni discourse articulated on the premise of 'defending the country against Christian radicals like Aoun;" Al-Manar used polarized Shiite discourse articulated on the premise of 'defending the country against the Future Movement;" LBCI used balanced Maronite discourse framed on the idea that the country is struggling in the middle of deadlock over an electoral law.

## 4.2. Reporting the Syrian War

### 4.2.1 The Story

The Syrian uprising has become the deadliest and longest episode of the Arab Spring. Begun as a peaceful protest demanding regime change, the conflict developed into a brutal civil war that has been unfolding for more than two years, killing nearly 70,000 people and displacing thousands of others.<sup>373</sup> The Alawite Syrian regime has refused to accede to the demands of the

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<sup>371</sup> Adonis Akra, "Al-Mashruh al-Orthodoxy Yakdi Ala Rihanat Al-Katila (The Orthodox Project Defeats Deadly Bets)", *Al-Akhbar*, March 8, 2013.

<sup>372</sup> Nabil Bu Monsef, "Al-Khawf Min Al-Ghad (Fear of Tomorrow)", *Annahar*, January 18, 2013.

<sup>373</sup> "By the Numbers: Syria Death," *CNN*, April 2, 2103.

protesters, mostly Sunnis. The refusal was met by an armed opposition called the Free Syrian Army, which is being assisted by Sunni and Salafist Jihadists from many countries of the Arab world with tacit American, Arab, and Turkish support.<sup>374</sup> The Syrian regime, on the other hand, has been receiving assistance from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon, and Shiite Islamists from Iraq.<sup>375</sup> Prospects of peace seem farfetched as Syria is backed by Russia and China, both privileged with veto power at the UN Security Council. The Assad family, who has ruled Syria for more than four decades, belongs to the Alawite sect, a minority offshoot of Shiite Islam. While there are other minorities including Christians, Druze, and Ismai'lis, the Sunnis make the majority of Syrians.<sup>376</sup> To analyze how the different media are reporting the Syrian war, it is important to understand the attitudes of the different Lebanese sectarian and political groups regarding Syria: The Sunnis, the Shiites, and the Christians.

#### ***4.2.2 The Context***

The Sunnis' relation with the Syrian regime, and its ally, Hezbollah, has dramatically deteriorated since the assassination of Rafik Hariri. The Sunnis accused the Syrian regime and its Lebanese protégé of killing Hariri and standing behind other assassinations, the most recent being that of an influential Sunni Brigadier General.<sup>377</sup> The political war waged by the Syrian regime against Lebanon's Sunnis succeeded at bringing down Saad Hariri's government in January 2011 and replacing it with a pro-Syrian prime minister. By maneuvering political and electoral alliances through its Lebanese allies, the Syrian regime was able to maintain control over the pol-

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<sup>374</sup> Liam Stack, "In Slap at Syria, Turkey Shelters Anti-Assad Fighters," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2011; "US Training Opposition Forces in Jordan for Months, Sources Say," *Fox News*, March 25, 2013.

<sup>375</sup> Julian Border, "Iran and Hezbollah Have built 50,000-Strong Force to Help Syrian Regime," *The Guardian*, March 14, 2103.

<sup>376</sup> Catherine Hornby and Alexander Dziadosz, "Syrian Civil War Devastates Farming, UN Says," *Reuters*, January 23, 2013.

<sup>377</sup> Bassem Mroue, "Wissam El-Hassan Dead: Lebanese Opposition Blames Syria for Intelligence Chief's Assassination," *The Huffington Post*, October 24, 2012.

itics of its Lebanese counterpart, even after it withdrew from Lebanon in 2005.<sup>378</sup> The growing strength of Hezbollah has further alienated the Sunnis, who have adopted a defensive discourse borne out of a feeling of marginalization and persecution. For example, a clash between Sunnis and Shiites in 2008 and the seizing by Hezbollah of Sunni streets in West Beirut was a humiliating blow to the Sunnis loyal to Hariri. Moreover, the plight of the Sunnis in Syria prompted Sunnis of Lebanon to support their fellow Syrian Sunnis.<sup>379</sup> The fact that Hezbollah fighters are assisting the Syrian regime in quelling the Sunni rebels has added to the alienation of Lebanese Sunnis. On the other hand, the Shiites' involvement in the Syrian war is both existential and strategic. Hezbollah claims it is defending the 14 Shiite villages along the Syrian-Lebanese border and that it has a duty to do so.<sup>380</sup> However, reports have said that Hezbollah considers any threat to Syria as a threat its existence since the fall of the Syrian regime would constrain Iran's ability to supply the Islamic party with weapons.<sup>381</sup>

The Christians, even those allied with Hezbollah, are uncomfortable with Lebanese intervention in Syria's internal conflict. They believe such intervention will drag Lebanon into the Syrian war, exacerbate the Sunnis-Shiite rift threatening stability in the country, and draw Lebanon further into the broader regional competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran.<sup>382</sup> Nonetheless, Christians are divided on the events in Syria. While March 14 Christians have been betting on the fall of the Syrian regime, March 8 Christians—the Aounists specifically— have adopted a more favorable stance toward Syria, from the point of view that a strong Alawite regime in Syria would prevent Sunni fundamentalists from rising in Lebanon.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Paul Salem, "Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis," *Carnegie Report*, December 2012.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>380</sup> Nasser Chararah, "Hezbollah Defends Villages in Syria War," *Al-Monitor*, February 20, 2013.

<sup>381</sup> "A Precarious Balancing Act: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict," *Middle East Report 132*, November 22, 2102, 10.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> "Aoun Warns of Lebanese Civil War if Assad Falls," *Naharnet*, June 16, 2012.



### 4.2.3 *Discourse Analysis*

The analysis begins with a comparison between two versions of the same news story on the Syrian war as they were presented on Future TV and Al-Manar. As is shown below, the stations' reportage of the same story diverged considerably: Future TV accused the Syrian regime of committing horrendous crimes against innocent civilians; Al-Manar absolved the Syrian regime from any responsibility of the crimes.

#### **A. Future TV**

Lead: Killings and systematic destruction do not suffice for Bashar Al-Assad's regime to crush the Syrian revolution. It is resorting today to the starvation of what is left of a Syrian people who withstood the monstrosity of its brigades.

For the second consecutive day, Bashar Al-Assad is bombing the bread ovens where queues of civilians are standing.

Report: Targeting bread ovens has become a habit of the Syrian regime; for it has become accustomed to bombing its citizens who are looking for their daily bread since the beginning of the Syrian revolution. This is Hilfaya; here, the echo of the carnage, the latest of the carnages of the Syrian regime. [There are] one hundred casualties between women, children and men. The aircrafts of the Assadian [Syrian] regime aim their missiles at the ovens of Hilfaya in Hama to kill whoever had hoped to return home carrying a loaf of bread, which has become very rare these days.<sup>384</sup>

The predominant belief system articulated in this report is that the Syrian regime headed by Bashar Al-Assad murderous. This belief is prevalent in the Lebanese psyche to varying degrees, as the people remain divided politically over Syria. However, the Lebanese civil war and the assassinations believed to be undertaken by the Syrian regime against Lebanese people generated ap-

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<sup>384</sup> Future TV Prime-Time News Bulletin, December 26, 2102.

prehension of Syria. This belief is very dominant today among the Hariri Sunnis who have complained of persecution by the Syrian regime and the Shiites in general. By saying that killing and destruction *do not suffice* and that the regime is resorting to other means, namely the *starvation of what is left of a Syrian people who withstood the monstrosity of his brigades* emphasizes the brutality of the regime and adds drama to emphasize his victimized people who are also "heroes" for withstanding his aggression.

A clear argumentative point is evident where the storyteller draws the conclusion that Syrian regime has the *habit* of bombing its citizens. His supporting evidence is presented with rhetorical flourish by telling the story of people trying to get their daily bread amid bombs. The discourse is laid out against images of bread ovens, destruction, and corpses. The use of the term *Assadian* is telling. In Arabic, Al-Assad (the family name of the Syrian president) means The Lion. When "Assadian" is used, in Arabic, *Al-Assadi*, means "as the lion." This technique is used to imply irony and sarcasm: a regime as strong as lion that kills its own people. The story is based on a rhetorical contrast: the Assad regime is monstrous, a greedy murderer; the people are poor, hungry, victimized.

The same argumentative techniques were used in the Hariri-owned *Al-Mustaqbal*. An editorialist compared the Syrian regime to a monster. In the author's words, the Assad regime "dwells in the blood of the most innocent—the blood of children; through this crime implemented systematically and with determination, the regime wants to tell the Syrian people that they have to live humiliated and degraded."<sup>385</sup> Ali Noun, a contributor to *Al-Mustaqbal*, argues that Bashar Al-Assad, if he could, would start fires everywhere. "It has become his only bet—

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<sup>385</sup> "Sanatan Ala Athar Suria: Rabih Mukhassab Bid'dam Wal Intisar Mu'ajjal (Two years Since Syria's March: A Spring Impregnated with Blood and the Victory Postponed)", *Al-Mustaqbal*, March 17, 2013.

exploding the region starting from his closet neighbor, Lebanon, who is by nature, prone "to dancing at the precipice of volcanoes."<sup>386</sup>

## **B. Al-Manar**

Lead: According to Syrian sources, armed men attacked the town of Hilfaya in Hama and committed crimes against the town's people killing a number of women and children and filmed the act in order to use it to put the blame on the Syrian army.

Story: Hilfaya saw itself suddenly under international media attention after news had circulated that Syrian missiles hit queues of civilians buying bread. According to images, there is no trace of air bombing as there is no sign destruction or a hole which was supposed to be caused by an air missile.

The Syrian Arab News Agency confirmed that armed men attacked Hilfaya and committed a massacre to accuse the Syrian army of it, [which happened] in conjunction with the visit of Al-Akhdar Al-Ibrahimi to Damascus.<sup>387</sup>

By attributing the information to *Syrian sources*, the presenter provides a degree of credibility, although it is not clear who or what these Syrian sources are. However, by saying that the armed men *filmed the act in order to use it to put the blame on the Syrian army*, she absolves the Syrian regime from responsibility. This absolution is emphasized further when the storyteller mentions that images show no sign of destruction resulting from the bomb. By using a conspiracy theory approach, the storyteller links three developments to lead the viewer into believing her own interpretation of the story. By saying that the town of *Hilfaya was suddenly under media attention*;

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<sup>386</sup> Ali Noun, "Dikkat Al- Assad (The Precision of Al-Assad)," *Al-Mustaqbal*, March 16, 2013.

<sup>387</sup> Al-Manar TV Prime-Time News Bulletin, December 26, 2012.

*that images show no trace of an air missile;" that the attack happened in "conjunction with the visit of Al-Akhdar Al-Ibrahimi to Damascus,"*<sup>388</sup> and by using attribution again to the Syrian Arab News Agency, the storyteller wants the viewer to believe that the enemies of the regime are committing crimes but are making them look like the Assad regime perpetrated them at the same time that a peace envoy was arriving in Syria amid international media attention. In other words, Al-Assad's enemies have orchestrated the event to make him look bad to the world.

Al-Manar has used an approach which, on the surface, looks more professional than that of Future TV: the level of rhetorical flourish is much less; the information is attributed. However, a more careful reading reveals that Al-Manar has constructed the discourse in such a way as to communicate a pro-Syrian view of the event. Its sources are either from the Syrian Arab News Agency which is government owned, or are unattributed. The story lacks the point view of the opposite side. The viewer is not given the choice to decide which version of the story to believe.

The conspiracy approach reflected in the story on Al-Manar coincides with the same conspiracy approach adopted by the pro-Hezbollah daily *Al-Akhbar*, where several reports linked the conflict in Syria to an international game of geopolitics. Georges Haddad said the war in Syria, just like others of the Arab Spring, was "part of a divisive American policy in the region." His analysis of the war coincides with the conspiracy logic that Iran, Syria, and Lebanon are targets:

The opposition groups in Syria (the Free Syrian Army) and some Islamic and secular gangs are nothing but a battalion of the world Islamic army in the leadership of America and Turkey....America and NATO, through political, financial, and media support from the gulf countries, are working on gathering the largest number of "Islamic volunteers" from all over the world to form an Islamic army, serve as an arm to NATO, which will be added in phases to the Turkish army. The primary task of this Islamic, Turkish, transat-

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<sup>388</sup> Al-Akhdar Al-Ibrahimi is the peace envoy assigned with negotiating a solution to the Syrian conflict.

lantic army is to limit Russian presence in the region and make comprehensive peace with Israel, to open a decisive battle with Hezbollah and its allies in Lebanon, then turn to Iran.<sup>389</sup>

Similarly, Ibrahim Al-Amine of *Al-Akhbar* describes the opposition in Syria as "the least ethical in the history of all contemporary oppositions," whose leaders are volunteers in the service of outside forces.<sup>390</sup>

Christian media have also been closely following the Syrian conflict. Unlike the Sunni and Shiite media, their discourse is less polarized, as the Christian communities may not be as directly involved in the conflict as their Sunni and Shiite counterparts. However, OTV showed commitment to its alliance with the pro-Syrian March 8 group by focusing on the supposed threat by the Sunni Free Syrian Army.

### **C. Orange TV**

According to the French Press Agency, at least 20 people were killed in the course of bombing in different regions of the country. This, as the Syrian Arab News Agency confirmed that the Syrian army destroyed terrorist nests in Rif Adlab and arrested a number of terrorists. The Syrian army also forestalled infiltration attempts of terrorists from Lebanon in Rif al Kusayr and arrested one of their leaders.

This as it was reported that the commander of the military police, Abdel Aziz Jassem Alshalal, defected from the Syrian army through a video tape posted on YouTube.<sup>391</sup>

OTV's information in this story comes from two sources: The French Press Agency and the Syrian Arab National Agency. While the report has not used sources from the Free Syrian Army to provide

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<sup>389</sup> George Haddad, "Syria's Battle and International Geopolitics," *Al-Akhbar*, January 26, 2013.

<sup>390</sup> Ibrahim Al-Amine, "Souriah al-Yawm: Al-Khair Bimo'jiza (Syria Today: Peace by Miracle)," *Al-Akhbar*, March 16, 2013.

<sup>391</sup> OTV Prime-Time News Bulletin, December 26, 2012.

counter evidence, it has attributed sources to AFP, which is not party to the Syrian conflict. This is meant to provide a degree of credibility. However, there is an implicit anti-Sunni discourse, which, at close reading, may be detected: by mentioning that the Syrian army "forestalled infiltration attempts of terrorists from Lebanon," while disregarding any accounts from the opposite side corresponds to the Aounist discourse that Sunnis are a threat (they are infiltrating the border into Syria and dragging Lebanon into war) and that the Syrian army who "forestalled the terrorists' attempts" is doing the right thing. This, in turn, justifies Aoun's alliance with Hezbollah and Syria, which has angered some of his followers and decreased his Christian following.<sup>392</sup>

Regarding the defection of the Syrian general, OTV stops at the news without giving any details as to why the general defected. This may be interpreted as attempt to avoid exposing the Syrian regime.

#### **D. LBCI**

The Syrian opposition said that tens of people were killed in the Kahtaniya farm as a result of what it called "a massacre the regime forces committed" and they announced that they started operations aimed at forcing the regime forces out of two camps in Wadi Al-Dayf and Hamidiya. The Syrian Arab News Agency said that the regime forces arrested a number of terrorist groups and that the Syrian forces reestablished control over three Alawite villages in Hama.

The commander of the military police in the Syrian army announced that he defected from the army because of what he said was "the army's deviation from its main mission to protect the country and its becoming gangs who kill and destroy." A Syrian security

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<sup>392</sup> Michael Slackman, "In Beirut High Spirits and Demand for Change," *The New York Times*, December 2, 2006.

source underestimated this defection and said that the commander was going to retire soon and that he defected to be a hero.<sup>393</sup>

In reporting the killings, LBCI presents attribution from both sides to the conflict. It directly quotes the opposition in describing the *massacre* committed by the regime forces. However, it equally presents the point of view of the regime by attributed information to the Syrian Arab News Agency. While the word *terrorist* is uttered, it clearly refers to the way the official Syrian government news agency (SANA) presents them, not LBCI, since they have previously referred to them as the Syrian opposition or the Free Syrian Army. Unlike OTV, which did not elaborate on this news, LBCI quoted the commander for the reason behind his defection. However, it also sought another version from a Syrian security source to establish balance.

The above analysis shows that Future TV bluntly portrays the Syrian regime as a murderer; Al-Manar, by contrast, defends it and absolves it. OTV's discourse lacks balanced coverage while LBCI reports the story by providing information from both sides to the conflict.

### **4.3. Sunni Radicals**

#### ***4.3.1 The Story***

On March 1, 2013, the Lebanese media focused on three significant events that happened concurrently. Radical Sunni Islamists detained in a Lebanese prison, held hostage members of the Internal Security Forces. The Islamists were rioting amid demands for general amnesty. The media reported that around 13 ISF members were held in one of the prison's sections and released shortly after. The Islamists had been detained on charges of affiliation with Fath-Al-Islam, a terrorist organization.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> LBCI Prime-Time News Bulletin, December 26, 2012.

<sup>394</sup> "Islamist Detainees Riot in Rumieh to Ask for Amnesty," *Naharnet*, March 1, 2013.

This, as a fiery Salafist sheikh opposed to Hezbollah, Ahmed Al-Assir, gathered his supporters in a rally in the southern city of Sidon to protest claims that Hezbollah had rented apartments near Al-Assir's mosque and used them as a depot for arms. Fearing the protest might escalate into sectarian clashes, Lebanese army troops and tanks were heavily deployed in the town where the sit-in was being held.<sup>395</sup>

Meanwhile in Beirut, Sunni men were reported to have harassed and insulted a Sunni Sheikh while giving his sermon in a mosque in downtown Beirut. According to some media reports, the men forced the Sheikh to step down from his podium while others reported that they urged him not to mention Saad Hariri in a negative way.<sup>396</sup>

#### **4.3.2 The Context**

The above incidents are examples of the rising Sunni fundamentalism manifesting in Lebanon as a result of the association of Lebanese Sunnis and Shiites with the Syrian war. Sunni anger has encouraged radical Salafist groups to rise to prominence, with leaders adopting an aggressive rhetoric against Syria and its ally, Hezbollah, which has appealed to large audiences. One of the most prominent and controversial Salafist sheikhs is Ahmad Al-Assir, who has gathered a large Sunni following. Viciously critical of Hezbollah and Iran, he refers to Hezbollah as the Iranian project in Lebanon. He has regularly held demonstrations against the Syrian regime and Hezbollah in defense of the Sunnis. He and his men carry arms which they justify as a security measure in the face of the "the Iranian occupation," in reference to Hezbollah. The resentment felt among Sunnis is articulated by the prominent Sunni cleric, Omar Bakri, who contends

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<sup>395</sup> "Al-Assir Supporters Hold Sit-in amid Heavy Security Deployment," *The Daily Star*, March 1, 2013.

<sup>396</sup> "Grand Mufti Denounces Beirut Mosque Incident," *The Daily Star*, March 1, 2013.



that Sunnis are coming out of chains...the blood of the innocents in Lebanon and Syria will not pass without accountability.”<sup>397</sup>

Amid these tensions, Sunni militants operate freely in several Sunni regions of Lebanon. Some of them belong to Fath Al-Islam (Conquest of Islam), a dangerous radical Sunni group, who fought battles in 2007 against the Lebanese army in a Palestinian refugee camp north of Lebanon. In Tripoli, severe clashes between Sunnis, loyal to the Syrian opposition, and Shiites, loyal to the Syrian regime, have been taking place since the beginning of the war in Syria.<sup>398</sup> The Sunnis see the war as an opportunity to limit Iran and Hezbollah's influence in the region. Hezbollah, on the other hand, accused the fiery Sunnis preachers of inciting sectarian strife and warned them not to provoke the Shiite party.<sup>399</sup>

#### **4.3.3 Discourse Analysis**

All four stations reported the three events in one introduction at the beginning of the news bulletin. This practice is common in Lebanese news making, where journalists connect between events to establish a framework for interpretations and conclusions. The incredibly lengthy leads were shortened for the purpose of the analysis and only the information that is directly related to these three events was retrieved.

**A.** In the opening introduction of its prime-time bulletin on March 21, 2013, LBCI

linked all three events as possibly part of a coordinated scheme:

The country today seemed like walking in a mine field: Al-Assir in Sidon, the Islamists in Rumieh prison, and attempts at removing the orator from the podium at the Mohammed Al-Amine Mosque in downtown Beirut. Sheikh Al-Assir is persistent with his daily sit-in until the truth about the two apartments that he accuses Hezbollah of using comes

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<sup>397</sup> Josh Wood, "Lebanon's Sunnis Gird for a Fight," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2013.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> "Nasrallah Warns Rivals Not to Provoke Hezbollah," *The Daily Star*, February 28, 2013.

out. And building B in Rumieh prison still enjoys a sort of self-rule. However, the more dangerous question is the concurrence of these events. Did they all happen at the same time coincidentally or are they coordinated movements among different Islamic factions in more than one area in Lebanon?<sup>400</sup>

The lead begins with a personification: "The country walking in a mine field." This imagery is drama enhancing and reveals a worrisome state of affairs. The three events are announced consecutively: *Al-Assir in Sidon, the Islamists in Rumieh, and attempts at removing the orator in a mosque in Beirut*. The parallel structure characterizing these phrases suggests that the events may be coordinated. This is reiterated in the question whether they happened *coincidentally* or whether they were *coordinated*. While the discourse does not directly accuse one side, it tends to raise the doubts that fundamentalists and Hariri supporters who attacked the mosque may be working together.

**B. OTV, unlike LBCI, directly accused the Sunni fundamentalists:**

Suddenly, as if a pass code was given to the Islamists. The zero hour started early in the day and tensions were moving in tandem in more than one Lebanese region. The headline of the events was written by Al-Assir of the city Sidon, which overcame a crisis. Tensions were both in the Rumieh prison and downtown Beirut, as the sanctity of mosques was not safe from attacks by a group of men from Tarik Al-Jadeedeh [A Sunni area in Beirut]. The situation is not far from exploding, especially now that Tripoli sources revealed that Takfiri groups [hard-line Sunnis] are receiving arms, including tanks and rocket launchers through the city's port.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> LBCI Prime Time News Bulletin, March 1, 2013.

<sup>401</sup> OTV Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 1, 2013.

The very first statement sets the framework or theme of the lead: the Islamists are coordinating operations across the country. According to the discourse, Al-Assir *wrote the headline*. This implies that he is the mastermind of the operations. The lead presents the prison riots and the mosque attacks in one sentence implying that they are part of the same plot. The discourse becomes more polemical with the phrase: *the sanctity of mosques was not safe from attacks by men from Tarik Al-Jadeedeh*. This rhetorical contrast is meant to emphasize the purity of mosques as opposed to the supposed savagery of the men from Tarik Al-Jadeedeh, an area in Beirut where many Hariri supporters reside. This puts the blame on Hariri and the Islamists for supposedly hurting their own people. However, by stating that the mosques are sacrosanct and vulnerable to fundamentalist attacks, OTV saves face and shows open mindedness to the Muslim religion. In other words, OTV is saying that its problem is not with Sunni Islam, but with Sunni fundamentalists—a way to defend itself against accusation that it is anti-Sunni.

#### C. Al-Manar, similarly, linked all three events and directly blamed the Future

Movement for standing behind them:

Sidon today was held hostage and turned into a military barricade. Other regions witnessed similar tensions which the Head of the Security Forces described as "planned" and "synchronized." Roads in Tripoli and Akkar [regions in north of Lebanon] were blocked while mobilization at the Rumieh prison resulted in the holding of Fath Al-Islam militants of 13 members from the Internal Security Forces hostage, incurring severe wounds on some of them. What is even more dangerous happened at the Mohammed al-Amine Mosque in downtown Beirut. Members from the Future Party forced the mosque's orator

to stop his speech and leave. They were angered by what they considered a critique by the sheikh of their own sheikh, Saad Hariri.<sup>402</sup>

The global meaning retrieved from this lead may be stated as follows: The Future Party is harboring Sunni fundamentalists and is the force behind all instability. This is evident by linking the tensions in Sidon, to the blocking of roads in other Sunni areas, to the attack on the mosque, which is directly blamed on the Future Party. The use of the sentence *Sidon was held hostage* is a personification meant to victimize the city of Sidon, which witnessed tensions triggered by its own inhabitants: the Sunnis. This is meant to emphasize that Sunnis are harming themselves. Mentioning that the events were *planned* and *synchronized* and attributing the news to an official source is meant to provide a stronger, more credible statement. The news dramatically accelerates until it reaches the *most dangerous* part: that the preacher in a prominent Sunni mosque in Beirut was attacked by members from the Future Movement. After listing the events, Al-Manar exposes the supposed culprit. According to the Shiite station, Future members were angered by an alleged critique by the *Sheikh*—who was giving the sermon—*of their own Sheikh, Saad Hariri*. This rhetorical contrast may be understood as emphasizing the difference between the first Sheikh, who is the victim, and the second Sheikh, who is the victimizer. Victimizing the first sheikh mitigates the anti-Sunni discourse, which Al-Manar is criticized for and is further emphasized in the news report that followed this lead, where Al-Manar interviewed Sunni clerics in Beirut who condemned the act.<sup>403</sup> It is noticeable, however, that the news makes no mention of the Salafist Sheikh, Ahmad Al-Assir, whose name was on every channel that day. Neither does the report which follows this lead, and which tells in more details the events in Sidon, makes mention of him. This tactic may be used to avoid discussing the question of the Hezbollah-

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<sup>402</sup> Al-Manar TV Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 1, 2013.

<sup>403</sup> See Al-Manar Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 1, 2013.

owned apartments which Al-Assir accused Hezbollah of using, and which was the main cause of the rally is Sidon.

**D.** Future TV, on the other hand, linked the tensions in Sidon to unlawful activities by Hezbollah and credited Al-Assir for acting responsibly and averting escalation of tensions:

Tensions were high in Sidon because of a demonstration Sheikh Ahmad Al-Assir had called for in protest of apartments Hezbollah has occupied to deploy arms near the Bilal bin Rubah Mosque. Meanwhile, a number of Islamist prisoners held hostage 13 members of the Internal Security Forces at the Rumieh prison, protesting regulations on visitor searching. This, as Hezbollah pursued its interference in the Syrian conflict causing a wave of indignation. We begin in Sidon, which refused to ignite flames of sedition after Sheikh Ahmad Al-Assir canceled a demonstration which he had called for after the Friday prayers in front of the apartments that belong to Hezbollah amid unprecedented security deployments.<sup>404</sup>

This lead does link the first two events; however, it clearly emphasizes the role of Hezbollah in the tension; that Al-Assir was protesting Hezbollah's use of apartments near a Sunni mosque—a fact which alarms Sunnis, who fear that Hezbollah might attack them. While there is mention of the Islamist prisoners, it is directly followed by a statement that Hezbollah *pursues its interference in the Syrian conflict causing a wave of indignation*. While this tactic may be meant to divert attention from the two events perpetrated by Sunnis, it is also meant to emphasize that radical Sunni resurgence in Lebanon is caused by Hezbollah's activities in Lebanon and Syria. Future TV also personifies Sidon, who *refused to ignite flames of sedition*, attributing noble qualities to the Sunni city and crediting Al-Assir for acting judiciously by canceling the demonstra-

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<sup>404</sup> Future TV Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 1, 2013.

tion in order to avert sectarian clashes. Regarding the attack on the Sunni Sheikh, Future TV refrained from including this news in the bulletin introduction. To reduce its importance, it mentioned it in a window during the newscast:

A number of worshipers asked the orator before giving his sermon at the Mohammed Al-Amine mosque in downtown Beirut not to attack Saad Hariri while giving his speech.

The army command said in a statement that no armed men were in the mosque, denying what some media networks have propagated.<sup>405</sup>

Unlike Al-Manar and other stations which devoted a whole report to this incident, Future TV barely mentioned it. The tactic was to reduce the event to an almost insignificant occurrence. While Al-Manar said the Future members used *force* against the orator, Future TV said they *asked* the orator *not to attack* the man. This gives a totally different idea of the men, who, according to Future TV, were not offensive. The lead also provides official evidence that the men were unarmed, unlike what Al-Manar had implied.

The rise in Sunni radicalism received mixed reactions from the press. For example, while Future TV refrained from showing Al-Assir as a culprit, the Future Movement denied any affiliation with him. As reported in *Al-Mustaqbal*, the secretary general of the Movement said the March 8 group was using Al-Assir's moves to corner the pro-Hariri Sunnis.<sup>406</sup> Another article, "Moves by Al-Assir and Hezbollah Supporters Expose Sidon to Danger," does not openly accuse Al-Assir but insinuates at his role in promoting instability in Sidon.<sup>407</sup>

However, there is also a tendency to justify the rise of Sunni fundamentalism as a reaction to Hezbollah activities. Ali Hamade, one of the staunchest anti- Syrian journalists and an

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> "Ahmad Hariri: Al-Assir: Attofl Al Mudallal Li Mikati Wa La Alaka Lil Mustaqbal Bih (Ahmad Hariri: Al-Assir: Mikati's Pampered Child and Future has no Relations with Him)," *Al-Mustaqbal*, March 20, 2013.

<sup>407</sup> "Taharrukan Li Munasiri Al-Assir Wa Hizbullah U'idan Saida Ila Da'erat Al-Khatar (Move by Al-Assir and Hezbollah Supporters Exposes Sidon to Danger)," *Al-Mustaqbal*, April 13, 2013.

*Annahar* opinion writer, argues that the Sunnis feel oppressed as a result of the policy of Hezbollah. They feel subjected to a new phase of political, moral, and national elimination at the hands of the Shiite party, who is dominating the country trying to make Lebanon an Iranian protectorate in the strategic sense.<sup>408</sup>

The above analysis shows that four stations shed the light on the supposed "threat" by Sunni radicals. While LBCI communicated this threat through a question for the audience to answer, OTV directly accused Al-Assir for allegedly orchestrating the events, and Al-Manar directly accused Hariri of causing the instability. Future TV, in contrast, connected the events to Hezbollah and absolved Al-Assir and Hariri from them.

#### **4.4. Wage Protests**

##### ***4.4.1 The Story***

Between February 19 and March 21, 2013, school teachers, public sector employees, and their representative unions held several sit-ins and strikes calling on the government to increase their wages. Protesters came from all regions in the country and vented their anger at the government for failing to refer the wage hike to Parliament for approval.<sup>409</sup>

##### ***4.4.2. The Context***

The protests came at a time of severe economic conditions in Lebanon. While the cabinet had previously approved a new salary scale for the public sector, the decision was put on hold due to lack of financing as well as opposition from business associations and economic bodies who argued that such a move would increase the government's deficit.<sup>410</sup> The unions accused the

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<sup>408</sup> Ali Hamadeh, "Luban, Al-Infijar khalf Al-Bab (Lebanon: The Explosion behind the Door)," *Annahar*, March 17, 2013.

<sup>409</sup> "Strikers Pile Pressure on Cabinet," *The Daily Star*, March 22, 2013.

<sup>410</sup> "Unions Vow to Cripple Public Sector," *The Daily Star*, March 14, 2013.

government of bowing to the pressures of the business groups and economic bodies.<sup>411</sup> Teachers and workers' unions spoke on behalf of the "oppressed, the wronged, the marginalized Lebanese [workers]," vowing that anybody who "antagonizes people or stands in the way of their dignity and decent living [will lose]."<sup>412</sup>

#### **4.4.3 Discourse Analysis**

The media across the politico-sectarian spectrum covered the story on a daily basis since it started in February. All four news networks provided similar coverage of the story. The discourse, unlike in the previous three stories, is neutral. The excerpts below show how all four stations reported the story on March 21, 2013.

**LBCI:** Thousands of union supporters marched to the Presidential Palace hours ahead of a conclusive cabinet session was to decide whether to refer their demands to parliament.<sup>413</sup>

**OTV:** While the cabinet was in session, the Unions Coordination Committee marched towards the presidential palace stressing it would not retract its stances.<sup>414</sup>

**Future TV:** Hours ahead of the conclusive cabinet session, public service employees and private schools teachers marched from the extreme North and South to Beirut to participate in the largest demonstration the unions have ever held since they started their strike.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>411</sup>"Lebanese Workers Strike over Wage Delays," *Al-Akhbar*, February 19, 20103.

<sup>412</sup> *The Daily Star*, March 14, 2013.

<sup>413</sup> LBCI Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 21, 2013.

<sup>414</sup> OTV Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 21, 2013.

<sup>415</sup> Future TV Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 21, 2013.



**Al-Manar:** On the 31<sup>st</sup> day of their open strike, the unions marched towards the Presidential Palace demanding the cabinet to refer the wage hike issue to parliament.<sup>416</sup>

Unlike the leads in the previous stories, all four leads are relatively short and straight to the point. They state the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why*. They are closer to the summary leads used in traditional Western media. The global meaning in all four leads is clear: a unions' march to pressure the cabinet to act on wage increases. The local meanings are non-argumentative.

In the reports that followed these leads, reporters covered the protests by recording speeches by union representatives and by interviewing protesters. Emphasizing the positive role of the unions' action, LBCI quoted a protester saying, "This is one of the most beautiful scenes which show national unity. This shows group spirit that builds the nation. We are demanding our children's rights; the rights of the poor people."<sup>417</sup> Similarly, OTV highlighted the role of the unions' strike in building national solidarity:

Crowds from various parties and sectarian affiliations, in one voice, called on the cabinet to refer the case [the wage hikes] to parliament. One woman was quoted as saying: "We don't know the people behind is if they are Christian or Muslim, March 8 or March 14; the unions have united us.

Just like sectarian politics, socioeconomic issues are also main concerns for the Lebanese. As Suleiman Taki Din of *Assafir* points out, "Lebanon today has two faces: pressing social issues on the one hand and sectarian politics on the other."<sup>418</sup> However, the unions' action was praised in the media as a positive step towards a better future. Fawwaz Trabulsi of *Assafir* stressed the diversity of the protesters, "[who were] of all ages and sectarian backgrounds, from both city and country-

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<sup>416</sup> Al-Manar Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 21, 2013.

<sup>417</sup> LBCI Prime-Time News Bulletin, March 21, 2013.

<sup>418</sup> Suleiman Taki Dine, "Al-Ijtimai Wal Madani, Dod Alttai'fi (The Social and the Civil against the Sectarian)," *Assafir*, January 14, 2013.

side all standing together...It was a perfect manifestation of this country's unity, its aspirations for a better future, and its sense of responsibility toward the coming generation.”<sup>419</sup> Ibrahim Haidar of *Annahar*, on the other hand, urged the unions to protect themselves against political, sectarian, and party interferences.<sup>420</sup>

The results of the story analyses may be summarized in the table below:

**Table 2: Story Analyses**

Station/Story	Orthodox Law	Syrian War	Sunni Radicals	Wage Protests
<b>LBCI</b>	Moderate Maronite discourse	Covers both sides to the conflict	Balanced, leans to critical	Neutral discourse
<b>OTV</b>	Polarized Maronite discourse	Biased to one side (the Syrian regime)	Blames Sunni fundamentalists together with the Future Movement	Neutral discourse
<b>Al-Manar TV</b>	Polarized Shiite discourse	Defends one side (The Syrian regime)	Blames the Sunni-led Future Movement	Neutral discourse
<b>Future TV</b>	Polarized Sunni discourse	Defends one side (The Sunni-led opposition) Attacks the Syrian regime	Blames Hezbollah	Neutral discourse

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<sup>419</sup> Fawwaz Trabulsi, "Lebanon in Need of Social Justice," *Al-Monitor*, February 27, 2013.

<sup>420</sup> Ibrahim Haidar, "Tahadiyyat Amam Hay'at Attansik (Challenges ahead of the Unions' Coordinating Committee)," *Annahar*, March 27, 2013.

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## CHAPTER 5: THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE LEBANESE POLITICO- EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

"We are before an existential Lebanese crisis. This crisis is not new; it is old and carved in the flesh and womb of history. "(George Obeid)<sup>421</sup>

### 5.1. The Function of Lebanese Media Discourse: Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the stories in chapter four was performed with the purpose of understanding the function of their discursive structures in the sociopolitical context within which they are presented. More specifically, the analysis was designed to reveal whether the discourse used in telling the stories reinforces or attenuates sectarian beliefs.

The first three stories—"Sectarian Fears," "Reporting the Syrian War," and "Sunni radicals"—illustrate a high degree of sociopolitical and sectarian divisions in Lebanon. With the exception of LBCI, OTV, Al-Manar, and Future TV, have all used inflammatory language which corresponds with the logic of their patrons. Both locally and globally, their discourse was realized through heavy reliance on argumentative strategies. The fourth story—"Wage Protests"—illustrates a socioeconomic crisis that Lebanese workers across sects are undergoing. None of the four stations adopted a sectarian discourse; instead of editorialized news, the language was constructed through simple summary leads that answered the what, where, when, who, why, and how. The reason for the different discursive strategies lies in the different nature of the stories: the first three stories are related to questions of identity and hegemony; the last story is concerned with basic human needs of living free from want. Based on these findings, which are ana-

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<sup>421</sup> Georges Obeid, "Hal Ta'allamna Min Hurubina (Have we Learned from our Wars?)," *Assafir*, March 3, 2013.

lyzed in line with the sociopolitical framework established in earlier chapters, two conclusions may be advanced:

1. Media discourse in the Lebanese plural democracy was more polarized in the stories of identity and hegemony and more neutral in the socioeconomic story. This duality in the nature of the discourse corroborates the premise advanced at the onset of the study: that the people in a plural democracy have diverging outlooks to the point of lacking a "common social demand;" the place where they can "combine" is the "marketplace," because making money and living free from poverty is a need that people share, irrespective of religion or sect. Reflecting the sociopolitical framework within which they operate, the media would, therefore, be naturally inclined to be more rhetorical in stories of identity and power struggles and more neutral in stories devoid of such themes.
2. In this context, a normative approach to the evaluation of media conduct in the Lebanese plural democracy would be problematic. The sociopolitical framework within which the media operate prevents them from being effective agents of national integration. Being operated by sects with conflicting identity narratives and political agendas, the media are automatically enmeshed into power struggles and serve as political, sectarian, and ideological platforms. Therefore, the role of the media in Lebanon is better understood if analyzed in conjunction with its sociopolitical framework and in the way it reflects conflicting and overlapping communal norms. This conclusion again corroborates the premise advanced by Rabushka and Shepsle in the introductory chapter: that "the plural state cannot be organized for social normative ends since these ends vary with the different cultural norms of the respective communi-

ties."<sup>422</sup> As is shown in the discussion below, the discourse used by OTV, Future TV, and Al-Manar reflects a sectarian battle which may be qualified as both existential and political.

### ***5.1.1 Politico-existential media battles***

How do the first three stories reflect a Christian existential and political battle that OTV is fighting? As already mentioned, Christians are the community whose survival in the larger Muslim Middle East has constantly been threatened. With the recent surge of Sunni fundamentalism in the Arab Spring and the "ethnic cleansing" against Christian communities in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, Christians in several countries of the Arab world feel vulnerable.<sup>423</sup> While the Sunni threat discourse may not be shared by all Lebanese Christians, it resonates at least among a large number of Aoun supporters. Aoun, who claims to be the representative of Christians suffering from *Ihbat* (Frustration) in Lebanon,<sup>424</sup> has repeatedly warned against the extremist Sunni threat,<sup>425</sup> and his media outlet, OTV, has done the same through news reports and programs emphasizing radical Sunni fighters and the surge of Salafism in Lebanon. For example, news reports on OTV have repeatedly featured *Jabhat Annousra* (The Victory Front), a radical group fighting along with the Free Syrian Army in Syria, whose members are trained by al-Qaeda. The reports have stressed worries that "*Annousra* men are infiltrating the Lebanese border."<sup>426</sup> Another investigative program is "Khatt Tamess" (Demarcation Line), which presents interviews with fighters from the Free Syrian Army, who "kill Alawites and Christians" and who want "to establish an Islamic emirate in Syria."<sup>427</sup> Even OTV's comedy program, "Mish Ma'aoul" (Unbelieva-

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<sup>422</sup> Rabushka and Shepsle, *Politics in a Plural Society: A Theory of Democratic Instability*, 11.

<sup>423</sup> Daniel Sapsted, "Arab Spring is a Threat to Christians, Says Archbishop," *The National*, June 16, 2011.

<sup>424</sup> "Bassil: Our Bloc Represents Christians, Not Suleiman," *Ya Libnan*, February 19, 2012.

<sup>425</sup> "Aoun Warns of Rise of Extremists in Syria," *The Daily Star*, December 10, 2012.

<sup>426</sup> See OTV News Bulletin, March 15, 2013.

<sup>427</sup> See "Khatt Tamess (Demarcation Line)," OTV, April 5, 2013.

ble) makes fun of Sunni fundamentalists, including Sheikh Ahmad Al-Assir, the radical and revisionist Lebanese Sunni cleric opposed to Hezbollah and Syria, who has called for Jihad in Syria.<sup>428</sup>

Fear for the very existence of Christians may explain why Aoun and his media are promoting the Orthodox electoral Law, which would theoretically give Christians stronger representation in a country where Muslims are the majority. However, it is not clear whether Aoun, himself, was pushing for the Orthodox Law out of fear over the fate the Christians of Lebanon or whether his battle for the Law was purely political and aimed at securing personal and party victories against his rivals in the Future Movement. What makes this question relevant is Aoun and OTV's disregard of another supposed threat that equally worries some Christians: Shiite hegemony and Iran's influence in Lebanon.<sup>429</sup> Aoun was able to convince Christian public opinion that his movement and Hezbollah are a "coalition of minorities" in the face of Sunni hegemony. This logic is based on the premise that Maronites, as Hilal Khashan explains, "are worried about the implications of the Arab uprisings for their own fate as a minority group, whereas Shiites dread the consequences the upheaval might have on their pan-Shiite project."<sup>430</sup> Khashan calls the Aoun-Hezbollah alliance "hypocritical," because Aoun and Hezbollah were former enemies who are now using each other for political purposes. Their coming together, in his words, "does not signify ideological affinity or a sense of common cause."<sup>431</sup> Aoun's alliance with Hezbollah explains why his media channel has leaned towards defending the Syrian regime based on the assumption that a strong Alawite regime in Syria would prevent Sunni radicals from accessing power in Lebanon.

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<sup>428</sup> See "Mish Ma'aoul (Unbelievable)," OTV, March 12, 2013.

<sup>429</sup> "Shia-Christian Alliance Shakes Lebanon Politics," *Middle East Strategic Information*, February 6, 2009.

<sup>430</sup> Hilal Khashan, "Lebanon's Shiite-Marionite Alliance of Hypocrisy," *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2012, 84.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

Al-Manar's battle is in line with the Shiite "struggle for power" and survival. This sect emerged from a history of persecution in a Sunni-dominated environment and dispossession in their own country. Their mobilization since the 1980s and the war against the Israeli "enemy" strengthened their communal ties and sense of duty as jihadists fighting for the cause of their community and Imams. This role also boosted their confidence as the only force capable of deterring Israeli aggression in the region. Shiite ethnocentricity is clear in Al-Manar's programming, which is mostly focused on the concerns of the Shiite community. Their idolization of Hezbollah and their "martyrs" is evident in various programs on the resistance, such as "Law Huzima Hizbullah" (If Hezbollah were Defeated), "Ayn Alal Adu" (Eye on the Enemy), and "Our Martyrs Hallmark of History." This ethnocentricity, however, raises questions as to the extent this community identifies with a Lebanese identity and whether their martyrdom is serving a Lebanese cause or a purely Shiite one.

The Shiites' protectiveness of their identity and political role in the face of rising Sunni power has manifested itself both locally and regionally. On the local level, Hezbollah has, since 2005, worked to weaken its anti-Syrian Sunni rivals. This was clear when Hezbollah attacked Sunni-dominated areas in Beirut in 2008, and when the Islamic party's ministers resigned from the Saad Hariri-led government in 2011, bringing about its collapse.<sup>432</sup> Also, Hezbollah staunchly supported the Orthodox Law on the basis of Proportional Representation as such formula would give the party political advantage over the Sunnis. The Future Movement has repeatedly expressed fears that the Law would give the Hezbollah-led opposition a majority in the next parliament.<sup>433</sup> On the regional level, Hezbollah has associated itself with the Syrian war as its sur-

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<sup>432</sup> "Hezbollah-Led Pullout Brings Down Lebanon's Government," *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 12, 2011.

<sup>433</sup> Eli Hajj, "March 14 Coalition Threatened by Draft Lebanese Electoral Law," *Al-Monitor*, February 22, 2013.

vival largely depends on the fate of its protectors, Syria and Iran.<sup>434</sup> In the words of Syrian journalist and analyst Hakam el-Baba, “Hezbollah is fighting its existential battle; if the regime in Syria falls, Hezbollah will be contained and besieged; if the regime in Syria changes, there will be a major support for anti-Hezbollah parties in Lebanon.”<sup>435</sup> Accordingly, Al-Manar has emphasized the Syrian regime's "heroic" acts in the face of "terrorists," in reference to the Syrian opposition.

Building on Shiite and Christian fears of Sunni fundamentalism, Hezbollah has, through Al-Manar, focused on two objectives: posing as a friend to Christians and warning of Sunni radicalism. In showing open-mindedness to the Christian faith, Al-Manar broadcast a special episode on Christmas of 2012, called “Al-Massih Fi Uyunin Muslima” (Christ in the Eyes of Islam), which discussed how Muslims perceived Jesus Christ. While they referred to Christ as a prophet, they commended Christ as “merciful, loving, and a messenger of world peace.”<sup>436</sup> Also Al-Manar’s coverage of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day featured reports showing Christmas celebrations in Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria.<sup>437</sup> Al-Manar's extensive reporting on Christmas holidays coincided with the Iranian Embassy's distribution of congratulation letters on the birth of “Prophet Jesus son of Mary.” Also the station broadcast speeches by Ayatollah Khamenei commending Christianity and highlighting its common grounds with Islam.<sup>438</sup> By contrast, the station emphasized the Sunni threat by devoting its news and political talk shows to warning against Sunni fundamentalists fighting in Syria. For example, the program, “Bayna Kawsayn” (Between Brackets) devoted a whole episode to *Jabhat Annousra* and its connection to al-Qaeda. On the

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<sup>434</sup> “Report Warns that Civil War Fighting has Split along Sectarian Lines, Pitting Ruling Alawites against Majority Sunnis,” *Reuters*, December 20, 2012.

<sup>435</sup> “FSA and Hezbollah Inch towards War, Lebanon in the Cross Fires Again,” *Al-Arabiya*, February 22, 2013.

<sup>436</sup> See Al-Manar Special Episode December 25, 2012.

<sup>437</sup> See Al-Manar News Bulletins December 24-25, 2012.

<sup>438</sup> See “Christianity in the Words of Imam Khamenei,” Al-Manar, November 7, 2012.

other hand, Al-Manar occasionally broadcasts shows whose aim is to "mend ties" between Sunnis and Shiites. For example, "Fi Rihab Attakrib" (Welcoming Rapport) invites guests to discuss ways to create a rapprochement between Sunnis and Shiites and "protect" them against discord which Al-Manar blames on the West. While this program may be a positive step toward social integration, it clearly contradicts with Hezbollah's actual policy, which has fiercely alienated Sunnis both in Lebanon and the region.

In this context, Future TV's battle is driven by the "persecution" of the Sunnis. It is waged against an enemy that has supposedly persecuted and killed Sunnis both in Lebanon and Syria. In Lebanon, the Alawite Syrian regime and its ally, Hezbollah, are accused of assassinating Rafik Hariri and antagonizing the Sunni community. In Syria, the regime is killing Sunnis with the help of Hezbollah. The Sunnis' political and existential battle has taken radical dimensions with the surge of Salafist groups, such as the movement of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Assir, who has mobilized Sunnis in Lebanon and declared Jihad in Syria. His argument, as that of other Salafist groups in Lebanon, is that Sunnis have an obligation to defend fellow Sunnis against crimes committed by Hezbollah and the Syrian regime.<sup>439</sup> While the Future Movement has announced its disassociation from Salafist groups, Future TV has adopted the cause of the Free Syrian Army in its fight against the Syrian regime. The Syrian conflict receives daily airtime not only in news bulletins but also in programs like *Suriah Alyawm* (Syria Today), where the atrocities committed by the Assad "brigades," as the network calls them, are emphasized.

The Sunnis' political and existential battle is also reflected in Future TV's fight against the Orthodox Law. As the adoption of the Law would weaken the Sunni-led Future Bloc, Future TV has focused its news reports and programs on showing the "threat" the adoption of such a law would pose to national unity. While the discourse of national unity might be a cover under

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<sup>439</sup> "Al-Assir Calls for Jihad in Syria," *Now Lebanon*, April 22, 2013.



which Sunni interests are secured, it has sought, through its promotion of the March 14 alliance, to present itself as advocating a "national" discourse that corresponds with the idea of national unity called for by Rafik Hariri. Future TV regularly broadcasts short video clips promoting Rafik Hariri and his son, Saad Hariri, as national leaders.

In contrast to OTV, Al-Manar, and Future TV, LBCI's discourse tends to be the least argumentative. The channel's pragmatic model has been evident since Pierre Daher took over the station from the Lebanese Forces and turned it from a partisan platform into a profitable business. While it has been dubbed as leaning towards the anti-Syrian March 14 alliance, the station has regularly covered the pro-Syrian, March 8 group, a fact which raises doubts about its true leanings in a media environment where stations are known to be affiliated with political patrons. Its decision to cancel an interview with the leader of the Lebanese Forces, Samir Geagea, on the very popular program "Kalam Enas" (People's Talk)<sup>440</sup> and its sacking of one of its lead reporters, Denise Rahme Fakhry, allegedly for her political support for the Lebanese Forces,<sup>441</sup> are evidence that the station might have shifted allegiance. While the true motives behind LBCI's policy and its actual leanings are not clear, the station has succeeded at attracting a large viewership, ranking first as the most viewed television channel in Lebanon in 2012.<sup>442</sup> LBCI's need to appeal to a larger audience has necessitated a pragmatic discourse that would be acceptable for all communities. While the station does not particularly work as tool of "national integration," it regularly produces reports that shed light on vital socioeconomic issues, such as unemployment, pov-

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<sup>440</sup> Hani M. Bathish, "LF Protests LBC Decision to Call off Interview with Geagea," *The Daily Star*, November 7, 2007.

<sup>441</sup> Sam Tarling, "LBC Journalists Claim They Were Sacked for Political Reasons," *The Daily Star*, October 16, 2009.

<sup>442</sup> "LBCI Rates as the Most Watched Television Channel in Lebanon for 2012," <http://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/68532/lbc-rates-as-the-most-watched-tv-channel-in-leban>

erty, traffic accidents, etc. Moreover, its most popular political program, "Kalam Ennas" (People's Talk) has been praised for the quality of its investigative reporting and balanced discourse.

The first three stories stand in sharp contrast to the fourth story—"Wage Protests." The wage story is devoid of sectarian identity issues. It concerns the basic needs of the individual: his right to live free from poverty. Regardless of sectarian and political affiliations, people share this need. In fact, socioeconomic issues are concerns that go in parallel with identity issues. One regards basic human rights and the other identity concerns and fear of the "Other." OTV and LBCI even focused their reportage on the role of the strikes in encouraging national solidarity. This is indicative that the media have the capacity to act as agents of integration when possible. However, such role is very difficult in cases of identity conflicts as the norms and the aspirations of the communities and the leaders, who control the media, and who are manipulated by foreign actors, differ greatly.

The Lebanese television discourse analyzed is, thus, reflective of the divergent outlooks of the three main communities. OTV represents polarized Maronite discourse aimed at securing the role of the Aounist Christians in the leadership of the Christian community. To do so, the station has emphasized the discourse of *Ihbat* (frustration) and marginalization of the Christians and the need to counter the Sunni threat. Al-Manar promotes Hezbollah and the Shiites as a community resisting Israeli "aggression." None of the other stations undertakes this level of propaganda against Israel. While the media in Lebanon are generally "anti-Israel," the naming of this "enemy" differs among the various networks. Other stations may refer to Israel as simply "Israel" or the "Israeli enemy;" Al-Manar, by contrast, calls it the "Zionist enemy," or the "Zionist entity," and refers to the United States as the "Greatest Satan." Its discourse defends Hezbollah's allies, Syria, and Iran because its existence and role in Lebanon and the region greatly depends on the

fate of these two regional protectors. Future TV promotes Hariri politics and is loyal to Hariri's patron, Saudi Arabia. It is currently busy with a propaganda war against Syria and its Lebanese allies. By emphasizing the discourse of "national unity," it seeks to promote and defend the Sunni community, who feels threatened by Hezbollah and the Syrian regime. LBCI attempts at moderate news-making, but is said to generally lean towards the anti-Syrian camp. Its more balanced approach may be the result of the feud between its original owners, the Lebanese Forces, and its CEO, Pierre Daher. However, its pragmatic policy and focus on entertainment has attracted a larger Lebanese and Arab audience.

The language that the different media channels have used, is, as Norman Fairclough argues, a "form of social practice that is part of society and not external to it; it is a social process conditioned by other non-linguistic parts of society...Linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort."<sup>443</sup> Sectarian discourse in Lebanese media is a natural byproduct of sectarian societal values and a fragmented political culture. Through argumentative discourse, the media affiliated with the different Lebanese groups have worked to persuade public opinion of their own norms and, consequently, have constantly reproduced sectarian beliefs and attitudes.

The reproduction and exacerbation of sectarian beliefs is more acute during periods of crises when the communities feel particularly threatened. Nabil Dajani has repeatedly criticized Lebanese media for "accentuating" differences among people, especially in times of conflict. By contrast, when the media seek to attenuate divisions, it is only because a political decision was made to stop incitement.<sup>444</sup> The post-Hariri assassination period is replete with examples of the media's ebb and flow. Right after Hariri's assassination, there was a sense of national unity not experienced since the years preceding the civil war. For a short period of time, the media, and

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<sup>443</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power: Language in Social Life* (Longman, 2001), 21.

<sup>444</sup> Media Sustainability Index Lebanon, 2010/2011.

television specifically, emphasized the sense of unity and togetherness that both political leaders and their followers felt and exhibited. However, the discourse of national unity soon ended with the political divisions between the March 8 and the March 14 groups. As of late 2006, tensions between the March 8 and March 14 camps were intensifying. The crisis turned violent in 2008 when Hezbollah and Hariri supporters fought street battles in West Beirut leaving up to 100 people dead. The media war between the March 8 and March 14 alliances reached its peak in May 2008, when Hezbollah gunmen attacked Hariri-owned media and unplugged their television station, accusing it of "stoking the flames of sectarianism." However, this state of affairs was temporarily reversed after rival Lebanese leaders signed the Doha Agreement in May 2008. The agreement, initiated by Qatar, and supported by Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, France, and the United States, ended the crisis which had begun 18 months earlier by giving more privileges to the Hezbollah-led opposition and agreeing on the election of a president approved by all parties. The post-Doha agreement period witnessed a relative appeasement in the media climate, when leaders and their media tools decided to calm things down. Another instance when the media attempted to attenuate differences was after the visit of Hariri's son, Saad Hariri to Syria, in December 2009 for the first time since his father's assassination. Hariri returned with a more lenient attitude towards Damascus, which resulted in an appeased climate between the pro-Syrian, March 8 and the anti-Syrian, March 14, and, consequently, pacification in the general media climate. This state, however, was again reversed with the debate over the Orthodox Law, which was translated into a media war that exposed inter-sectarian fears and political struggles.

Similarly, the involvement of Lebanese Sunni and Shiite fighters in the war in Syria has dragged the Lebanese media into the war despite the fact that the Lebanese government has announced a position of neutrality regarding the Syrian conflict. The fact that the Lebanese media

did not respect the government's order shows again that the media operate in conjunction with the agendas of their sectarian leaders, who are stronger than the state. In relation to the tensions between Sunnis and Shiites, the National Audiovisual Council has recently bemoaned the constant use of sectarian language. It accused media channels of repeatedly using the word "war" in the introductory segments of their bulletins and in news coverage, "which leads to escalating the situation of sectarian tension."<sup>445</sup> The council blamed the media of using "sectarian, inflammatory rhetoric that harmed the country's stability and civil peace."<sup>446</sup> One instance that substantiates the Council's statements is the law suit that Saad Hariri and his bloc member, Okab Sakr, filed against OTV and *Al-Akhbar* newspaper for allegedly using falsified information that involved Hariri and Sakr with the Free Syrian Army. They accused them of not just violating the print law, but "forging crime with ulterior motives that threaten civil peace."<sup>447</sup>

Despite the complaints by the NAVC, the television networks have not changed their discourse. Sectarian discourse is likely to continue because the outlooks of the community leaders *who own the media* and who also *rule the country* diverge considerably. The patron-client relationship characteristic of Lebanese sectarian culture and the loyalty to the subgroup and the leader has largely affected the Lebanese mediascape: private television stations owned by sectarian leaders are stronger and much more popular than the only state-run television. Moreover, the fact that the sects see themselves as sectarian, religious, and ideological extensions of regional powers, makes the media often enmeshed in local and regional political and sectarian conflicts. This explains the polarization of the media along the March 8, March 14 divide. What adds to this state of affairs is the media's drive for profit, which has invited foreign powers to invest in Lebanese media in return for allegiance. Nabil Dajani maintains that Lebanese media behavior is

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<sup>445</sup> Media Bodies Trade Blame over Sectarian Tone in Coverage," *The Daily Star*, March 23, 2013

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> "Lebanese Politicians to Sue Two Media Outlets over Forged information," December 23, 2012.

characterized by a market rather than public service orientation. This results in "confusion between the freedom of the media to inform people, their freedom to propagate tribal/sectarian dogma, and their freedom to seek material profit." Financial need makes the Lebanese media "open to overtures of financial assistance from foreign groups in exchange for editorial support."<sup>448</sup> Thus, the media in Lebanon "tend to take the color of the money poured into them...and do not hesitate to express interests other than their own and sacrifice credibility for material profit."<sup>449</sup>

Amid conflicting identity narratives and divergent sociopolitical outlooks, it is not surprising that the journalism profession in Lebanon lacks a generally accepted code of ethics. While certain rules of conduct are found in bodies such as the Penal Code, the Publications Law, the Audiovisual Media Law, the 1962 Press Law, and the Military Justice Code, the laws are broadly drafted, vague, and inconsistent.<sup>450</sup> A project initiated by the Maharat Foundation in cooperation with UNESCO to devise a generally accepted press code stated that, "There is no effort to develop a code of ethics internally within each media institution, and there hasn't been any agreement on one code of ethics which all media institutions can abide by."<sup>451</sup> This leaves the profession without established guidelines and wrong practice open to various interpretations and inconsistent penalization. This, however, does not mean that journalists are uninformed about socially responsible journalism. In fact, media professionals constantly bemoan the recurrence of irresponsible media behavior. Zahera Harb, a Lebanese journalist and academic, maintains that "Lebanese journalism often lacks sufficient ethical foundations and that formal guidance on

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<sup>448</sup> Nabil Dajani, "Ethics and the Media: The Lebanese Experience," Conference of Bioethics in the Media, December 11, 2012.

<sup>449</sup> Sanaa Khoury, "A Need of Stronger Code of Journalistic Ethics in Lebanon?" *Al-Monitor*, August 2012.

<sup>450</sup> Rima Marroush, "Lebanon Tries to Modernize its Chaotic Media Laws," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, December 13, 2010.

<sup>451</sup> "Production of a Code of Ethics Agreed Upon by Journalists," *Maharat Foundation-UNESCO Project*, 22.

The Maharat Foundation (Arabic for "Skills Foundation") is an organization of professional journalists who work to promote free journalism and defend freedom of expression.

press standards and boundaries barely exist."<sup>452</sup> Ahmed Zinedine, a professor of media studies at the Lebanese University, argues that "it is certainly not a journalist's job to preach; [his job] is to present verified information and commentary, without exaggeration or provocation." Zinedine compares Lebanese news reports with European journalism, where "no report exceeds one minute or one and a half minutes, regardless of its importance."<sup>453</sup> This, along with the sectarian nature of the Lebanese media, raises doubts about the media's true freedom. Dajani argues that the freedom attributed to Lebanese media is a myth. Because the government is weak, the media are relatively free from government control. However, they are not free from the control of their sectarian patrons. Lebanese journalists are free only as long as their editorial policies do not contradict the political and sectarian color of their institution.<sup>454</sup> A recent example is the firing of Joe Maalouf, the host of the very controversial program on MTV "Enta Hurr" (You are Free). Maalouf used his show to expose government corruption, attack political leaders, advocate for social justice, etc. While MTV had supported Maalouf, being a station that calls itself "the voice of freedom" and the "voice of the silent majority," it fired Maalouf for "crossing the lines." In the last episode before the termination of his show, Maalouf exposed and attacked the mayor of a city in Lebanon for allegedly mistreating homosexuals after shutting down a gay bar. Sources say that Gabriel El- Murr, the owner of the station, was upset by Maalouf's behavior, which antagonized a mayor who could support El-Murr in parliamentary elections.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Zahera Harb, "Irresponsible Reporting in Lebanon Calls for Media Standards," *The Journalism Foundation*, August 24, 2012.

<sup>453</sup> Sanaa Khoury, "A Need of Stronger Code of Journalistic Ethics in Lebanon?" *Al-Monitor*, August 2012.

<sup>454</sup> Dajani, "Ethics and the Media: The Lebanese Experience," *Conference of Bioethics in the Media*, December 11, 2012.

<sup>455</sup> "In Facts: This is what Happened between Inta Hurr and MTV," *Lebanon Debates*, May 8, 2013.

## 5.2 Forums of Debate

Despite loyalty to sectarian patrons, the Lebanese media system remains the freest in the Arab world. What distinguishes Lebanese media from those in their Arab entourage is their orientation towards controversy and public debate. Both broadcast and print media have served as forums for a multitude of ideas and political, ideological, and sectarian affiliations. The plural Lebanese polity and the consociational mechanisms that rule it have prevented the rise of an oppressive ideology, which, in turn, has allowed diversity to flourish. It is this quality, specifically, which bestows upon Lebanon its unique character. In other Arab countries where the state is strong, the media have been controlled; in Lebanon where the sectarian communities are stronger than the state, the media have been relatively free to operate. Moreover, media privatization in the Arab world has been a top-down process while in Lebanon it has been a bottom up process.<sup>456</sup> Even when Lebanon was under Syrian hegemony, the media, albeit censored, retained a degree of freedom not found elsewhere in the Arab world.

In this context, the freedom available to Lebanese journalists allows them to be advocates of some issues of national importance. For example, the highly controversial question of civil marriage legislation received considerable media attention in Lebanon between January and April 2013, when a Lebanese couple, a Sunni and a Shiite, decided to marry civilly by opting to remove their religious affiliation from their civil records. For the first time in Lebanese history, the media, with the help of civil society groups, participated in pressuring the government to register the marriage. Despite religious opposition, the move set an important precedent for others

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<sup>456</sup> Marwan Kraidy, "Globalization *Avant La Lettre*: An Ethnographic Perspective," in *Global Media Studies: An Ethnographic Perspective*, eds., Patrick E. Murphey and Marwan Kraidy (New York: Routledge Chapman & Hall, 2004), 278.



who can now, theoretically, marry civilly.<sup>457</sup> Advocates of civil marriage consider it a step towards the eradication of sectarianism and nation-building because it encourages people of different sects to marry. For years, they have struggled with obstinate religious opposition to such legislation. While most news channels covered the story, some journalists fiercely defended it by supporting civil society groups in the face of rigid religious refusal. Future TV's host, Nadim Koteish, consecrated DNA's episode of January 29, 2013 to criticize the Grand Mufti's objection to legalizing civil marriage,<sup>458</sup> while Future TV's Paula Yacubian adamantly campaigned for the cause.<sup>459</sup> MTV has probably been the most aggressive TV station on behalf of civil marriage legislation. The issue was raised on many of the station's most watched programs including, "Enta Hurr" (You are Free) with Joe Maalouf, "Sabaa" (Seven) with Serge Zarka, and Bimawdu'eeya" (Objectively), with Walid Abboud. While the first two programs took the task of defending civil marriage legislation, Abboud's program provided a forum where Sunnis, Shiites, and Christians were invited to debate the issue. Although they argued fiercely showing their seemingly irreconcilable views, the debate allowed audiences to see different views on the matter.<sup>460</sup>

Other controversial questions are also addressed. Joe Maalouf, in "Enta Hurr" (You are Free), has used his program to attack Hezbollah and the Salafist leader Mohammed Al-Assir for dragging Lebanon into strife and ruining its reputation, as well as exposing cases, such as corporate punishment in schools and government corruption.<sup>461</sup> Similarly, LBCI's very popular "Kalam Ennas" (People's Talk) has raised issues facing Lebanon and the region ranging from political to economic to social to humanitarian to cultural.<sup>462</sup> LBCI's very controversial "Ahmar

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<sup>457</sup> "Lebanon Civil Marriage Raises Hope for Change," *Al-Jazeera*, May 2, 2013.

<sup>458</sup> See DNA episode January 29, 2013.

<sup>459</sup> Paula Yacoubia MTV with Serge Zarka, February 2, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8qqSiPeMnw>

<sup>460</sup> Episode on Civil Marriage in the TV show "Bimawdu'eeya (Objectively)," MTV, February 18, 2013.

<sup>461</sup> See Joe Maalouf Episode, [http://mtv.com.lb/Enta\\_Horr](http://mtv.com.lb/Enta_Horr)

<sup>462</sup> See Kalam Ennas, <http://www.lbcgroup.tv/Kalam-ennas-en/>

Bel Khat Al-Arid" (Bold Red Line) has discussed topics such as homosexuality, trans-sexuality, and Freemasonry—all considered taboo in the Arab world.<sup>463</sup> Future TV's Daily News Analysis (DNA), on the other hand, provides host Nadim Koteish with a podium to critically, and sometimes cynically comment on the latest political events.<sup>464</sup> Other cases include the bold Al-Jadeed (New TV), famous for its scoop reporting and tendency to trigger scandals. Ghada Eid's program on Al-Jadeed, "Al-Fasad" (Corruption) has caused many law suits to be filed against both Eid and the station for exposing corruption.<sup>465</sup> Moreover, in attempts to assume a more public service-oriented approach, Al-Jadeed entered into partnership with the United Nations Development Program to promote "Live Lebanon" an initiative aimed at development projects. The station's job is to raise awareness about living conditions of local communities and incite people to make contributions to the initiative.<sup>466</sup>

The above examples are evidence that journalists do have the potential to play a public-service oriented role. However, such potential is more likely to be invested in societal, cultural, and economic issues, and less in politico-sectarian issues enmeshed with identity struggles. Whenever such issues are addressed, the Lebanese media only amplify them. With the freedom they enjoy, Lebanese journalists address such issues in news, talk shows, and debates, but only to exacerbate divisions rather than attenuate them. The intersection of social sectarianism, political sectarianism, and the volatile geopolitical setting surrounding Lebanon has caused the Lebanese plural democracy to be constantly precarious. This, in turn, continuously affects the media climate. As long as Lebanon remains a non-national state; as long cleavages do not cross-cut and political culture remains fragmented, as long as the media will remain a weak instrument incapa-

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<sup>463</sup> See Bold Red Line, <http://www.lbcgroup.tv/Ahmar-belkhatalareed-en/>

<sup>464</sup> See DNA, <http://beta1.futuretvnetwork.com/node/1347>

<sup>465</sup> IREX Report, 2010-2011.

<sup>466</sup> "Al-Jadeed Joins UNDP in Promoting Live Lebanon," *The Daily Star*, March 5, 2013.

ble of contributing to national integration. The media, therefore, are better evaluated in the context of the consociational formula that regulates the relationship among the different Lebanese communities. For the mediascape associated with this formula does not necessarily induce nation-building; rather, it goes in line with the divisive sociopolitical environment within which it operates.

### **5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study on the media in the Lebanese plural democracy may be expanded in at least five ways.

**Newspaper discourse:** The study focused on television discourse and mentioned newspaper discourse only occasionally. Newspaper editorial excerpts were used as supporting evidence for purposes of triangulation. The argumentative structure of opinion pieces has served as substantiation of the sectarian and political inclinations of the newspapers. What might add value to the research, however, is a comparative analysis of newspaper headlines, not opinion pieces. Story headlines are frames that provide global meanings of newspaper stories. A critical comparative analysis of the competing headlines would reveal how a newspaper may communicate a theme under the cover of a legitimate news headline and where the meaning may be detected. Similarly, a quantitative comparative content analysis of certain terms as they are mentioned in headlines and stories may reveal the extent to which a newspaper is predisposed to communicate a certain belief structure.

**Story selection:** The stories analyzed in this study were political and socio-economic only. The stories were selected for their ability to illustrate controversial and critical issues related to identity and power struggles. A broader choice of stories, including social, educational, and

entertainment news, may help give a more comprehensive picture of the overall media climate. While the study provides examples where the media have potential to play a public service-oriented role, it does not probe them in depth nor does it consider the frequency of their coverage. A look at different types of stories might reveal whether the media present social, educational, and entertainment stories in a way geared toward bringing people closer.

**Interviews:** Since the research is concerned with the analysis of discourse, it did not include interviews. With the exception of quotes retrieved from newspapers and other public statements, the method was confined to observation, discourse analysis, and other tools of case study research. Interviews would have been helpful had the research been more focused on the social responsibility question. Because the journalism profession in Lebanon lacks a widely-accepted code of ethics, interviewing journalists and gatekeepers from the different media might reveal whether their understanding and definition of socially responsible behavior differ in line with the media they work for. For example, Al-Manar is known to broadcast images of dead bodies resulting from Israeli crimes against Palestinian and Lebanese people. While this practice may be deemed unethical in journalism practice, Al-Manar justifies it as a duty to inform the world of the atrocities committed by the "Israeli enemy."<sup>467</sup> This view is shared by the pan-Arab channel Al-Jadeed (New TV). The station's director of news and political programs, Maryam El-Bassam, said the station "deliberately shows [images of massacres] no matter how cruel and graphic they are, so that the whole world can see Israel's crimes and immorality."<sup>468</sup> However, this reasoning is not echoed by OTV, for example, whose news director said that the station "evaluates its images before deciding to broadcast them...and avoids any image that may hurt

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<sup>467</sup> Al-Manar: In The Name of Hezbollah, DVD, by E. Drevillon and O. Farraro, 2004.

<sup>468</sup> Fatimah Abdallah, "News Media Ethics in Lebanon: How Much Blood is Enough?" *Al-Monitor*, May 26, 2012.

someone or raise hatred or fear, in accordance with professional standards, even if this was at the expense of a breaking story.<sup>469</sup>

**The media as the independent variable:** By basing the study on the premise that the media reflect the social and political environment in which they operate, the sociopolitical framework was used as the independent variable and the media as the dependent variable. Another approach may also be useful; considering the media the independent variable and the society the dependent variable. This approach, evidently, would require a separate study with a different methodology. An audience study might help determine audience preferences and reactions to media messages, and would reveal how media messages impact people's perceptions and actions.

**Online and social media:** The present study could include an analysis of online and social media. Besides having their television news channels online, all political and sectarian parties have websites and blog sites where they post news and commentary. Popular ones include [www.tayyar.org](http://www.tayyar.org), the official website of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement; [www.lebanese-forces.com](http://www.lebanese-forces.com), the official website of the Lebanese Forces; [Muqawama.org](http://Muqawama.org) (Resistance.org), Hezbollah's online arm, [www.14march.org](http://www.14march.org), the online wing of the Future movement-led March 14 alliance, Now Lebanon, also affiliated with the Future Movement, to name a few. Looking at how online media coincide with or differ from local media could serve as substantiating, expanding, or reversing the conclusions advanced in this study.

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

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